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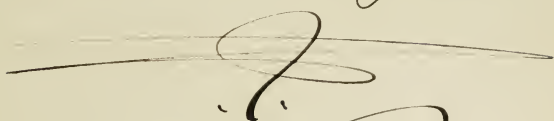
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BEEHCROFT AT ROCKSTONE



BEECHCROFT AT ROCKSTONE

BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

AUTHOR OF 'THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE,' UNKNOWN TO HISTORY.
ETC

IN TWO VOLUMES

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BEEHCROFT AT ROCKSTONE

CHAPTER XIII

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

MISS MOHUN came back in the dark after a long day, for once in her life quite jaded, and explaining that the health-officer and the landlord had been by no means agreed, and that nothing could be done till Sir Jasper came home and decided whether to retain the house or not.

All that she was clear about, and which she had telegraphed to Aden, was, that there must be no going back to Silverfold for the present, and she was prepared to begin lodging-hunting as soon as she received an answer.

‘And how have you got on?’ she asked, thinking all looked rather blank.

‘We haven’t been to see Fly,’ broke out Valetta, ‘though she went out on the beach, and Mysie must not stay out after dark, for fear she should cough.’

‘Mysie says they are afraid of excitement,’ said Gillian gloomily.

‘Then you have seen nothing of the others?’

‘Yes, I have seen Victoria,’ said Aunt Adeline, with a meaning smile.

Miss Mohun went up to take off her things, and Gillian followed her, shutting the door with ominous carefulness, and colouring all over.

‘Aunt Jane, I ought to tell you. A dreadful thing has happened!’

‘Indeed, my dear! What?’

‘I have had a valentine.’

‘Oh!’ repressing a certain inclination to laugh at the bathos from the look of horror and shame in the girl’s eyes.

‘It is from that miserable Alexis! Oh, I know I brought it on myself, and I have been so wretched and so ashamed all day.’

‘Was it so very shocking! Let me see——’

‘Oh! I sent it back at once by the post, in an envelope, saying, “Sent by mistake.”’

‘But what was it like? Surely it was not one of the common shop things?’

‘Oh no; there was rather a pretty outline of a nymph or muse, or something of that sort, at the top—drawn, I mean—and verses written below, something about my showing a lodestar of hope, but I barely glanced at it. I hated it too much.’

‘I am sorry you were in such a hurry,’ said Aunt Jane. ‘No doubt it was a shock; but I am afraid you have given more pain than it quite deserved.’

‘It was so impertinent!’ cried Gillian, in astonished, shame-stricken indignation.

‘So it seems to you,’ said her aunt, ‘and it was very bad taste; but you should remember that this poor lad has grown up in a stratum of society where he may have come to regard this as a suitable opportunity of evincing his gratitude, and perhaps it may be very hard upon him to have this work of his treated as an insult.’

‘But you would not have had me keep it and tolerate it?’ exclaimed Gillian.

‘I can hardly tell without having seen it; but you might have done the thing more civilly, through his sister, or have let me give it back to him. However, it is too late now; I will make a point of seeing Kalliope to-morrow, but in the meantime you really need not be so horribly disgusted and ashamed.’

‘I thought he was quite a different sort!’

‘Perhaps, after all, your thoughts were not wrong; and he only fancied, poor boy, that he had found a pretty way of thanking you.’

This did not greatly comfort Gillian, who might prefer feeling that she was insulted rather than that she had been cruelly unkind, and might like to blame Alexis rather than herself. And, indeed, in any case, she had sense enough to perceive that this very unacceptable compliment was the consequence of her own act of independence of more experienced heads.

The next person Miss Mohun met was Fergus,

lugging upstairs, step by step, a monstrous lump of stone, into which he required her to look and behold a fascinating crevice full of glittering spar.

‘Where did you get that, Fergus?’

‘Up off the cliff over the quarry.’

‘Are you sure that you may have it?’

‘Oh yes; White said I might. It’s so jolly, auntie! Frank Stebbing is gone away to the other shop in the Apennines, where the old boss lives. What splendiferous specimens he must have the run of! Our Stebbing says ’tis because Kally White makes eyes at him; but any way, White has got to do his work while he’s away, and go all the rounds to see that things are right; so I go after him, and he lets me have just what I like—such jolly crystals.’

‘I am sure I hope it is all right.’

‘Oh yes, I always ask him, as you told me; but he is awfully slow and mopy and down in the mouth to-day. Stebbing says he is sweet upon Gill; but I told him that couldn’t be, White knew better. A general’s daughter, indeed! and Will remembers his father a sergeant.’

‘It is very foolish, Fergus. Say no more about it, for it is not nice talk about your sister.’

‘I’ll lick any one who does,’ said Fergus, bumping his stone up another step.

Poor Aunt Jane! There was more to fall on her as soon as the door was finally shut on the two rooms communicating with one another, which the sisters

called their own. Mrs. Mount's manipulations of Miss Adeline's rich brown hair were endured with some impatience, while Miss Mohun leant back in her chair in her shawl-patterned dressing-gown, watching, with a sort of curious wonder and foreboding, the restlessness that proved that something was in store, and meantime somewhat lazily brushing out her own thinner darker locks.

'You are tired, Miss Jane,' said the old servant, using the pet name in private moments. 'You had better let me do your hair.'

'No, thank you, Fanny; I have very nearly done,' she said, marking the signs of eagerness on her sister's part. 'Oh, by the bye, did that hot bottle go down to Lilian Giles?'

'Yes, ma'am; Mrs. Giles came up for it.'

'Did she say whether Lily was well enough to see Miss Gillian?'

Mrs. Mount coughed a peculiar cough that her mistresses well knew to signify that she *could* tell them something they would not like to hear, if they chose to ask her, and it was the younger who put the question—

'Fanny, did she say anything?'

'Well, Miss Ada, I told her she must be mistaken; but she stuck to it, though she said she never would have breathed a word if Miss Gillian had not come back again, but she thought you should know it.'

'Know what?' demanded Jane.

‘Well, Miss Jane, she should say ’tis the talk that Miss Gillian, when you have thought her reading to the poor girl, has been running down to the works—and ’tis only the ignorance of them that will talk, but they say it is to meet a young man. She says, Mrs. Giles do, that she never would have noticed such talk, but that the young lady did always seem in a hurry, only just reading a chapter, and never stopping to talk to poor Lily after it; and she has seen her herself going down towards the works, instead of towards home, ma’am. And she said she could not bear that reading to her girl should be made a colour for such doings.’

‘Certainly not, if it were as she supposes,’ said Miss Mohun, sitting very upright, and beating her own head vigorously with a very prickly brush; ‘but you may tell her, Fanny, that I know all about it, and that her friend is Miss White, who you remember spent an evening here.’

Fanny’s good-humoured face cleared up. ‘Yes, ma’am, I told her that I was quite sure that Miss Gillian would not go for to do anything wrong, and that it could be easy explained; but people has tongues, you see.’

‘You were quite right to tell us, Fanny. Good-night.’

‘People has tongues!’ repeated Adeline, when that excellent person had disappeared. ‘Yes, indeed, they have. But, Jenny, do you really mean to say that you know all about this?’

‘Yes, I believe so.’

‘Oh, I wish you had been at home to-day when Victoria came in. It really is a serious business.’

‘Victoria! What has she to do with it? I should have thought her Marchioness-ship quite out of the region of gossip, though, for that matter, grantees like it quite as much as other people.’

‘Don’t, Jane; you know it does concern her through companionship for Phyllis, and she was very kind.’

‘Oh yes, I can see her sailing in, magnificently kind from her elevation. But how in the world did she manage to pick up all this in the time?’ said poor Jane, tired and pestered into the sharpness of her early youth.

‘Dear Jenny, I wish I had said nothing to-night. Do wait till you are rested.’

‘I am not in the least tired, and if I were, do you think I could sleep with this half told?’

‘You said you knew.’

‘Then it is only about Gillian being so silly as to go down to Miss White’s office at the works to look over the boy’s Greek exercises.’

‘You don’t mean that you allowed it!’

‘No; Gillian’s impulsiveness, just like her mother’s, began it, as a little assertion of modern independence; but while she was away that little step from brook to river brought her to the sense that she had been a goose, and had used me rather unfairly, and so she came and confessed it all to me on the way home from

the station the first morning after her return. She says she had written it all to her mother from the first.'

'I wonder Lily did not telegraph to put a stop to it.'

'Do you suppose any mother, our poor old Lily especially, can marry a couple of daughters without being slightly frantic? Ten to one she never realised that this precious pupil was bigger than Fergus. But do tell me what my Lady had heard, and how she heard it.'

'You remember that her governess, Miss Elbury, has connections in the place.'

'“The most excellent creature in the world.” Oh yes, and she spent Sunday with them. So that was the conductor.'

'I can hardly say that Miss Elbury was to be blamed, considering that she had heard the proposal about Valetta! It seems that that High School class mistress, Miss Mellon, who had the poor child under her, is her cousin.'

'Oh dear!'

'It is exactly what I was afraid of when we decided on keeping Valetta at home. Miss Mellon told all the Caesar story in plainly the worst light for poor Val, and naturally deduced from her removal that she was the most to blame.'

'Whereas it was Miss Mellon herself! But nobody could expect Victoria to see that, and no doubt she is

quite justified in not wishing for the child in her schoolroom ! But, after all, Valetta is only a child ; it won't hurt her to have this natural recoil of consequences, and her mother will be at home in three weeks' time. It signifies much more about Gillian. Did I understand you that the gossip about her had reached those august ears ?'

'Oh yes, Jane, and it is ever so much worse. That horrid Miss Mellon seems to have told Miss Elbury that Gillian has a passion for low company, that she is always running after the Whites at the works, and has secret meetings with the young man in the garden on Sunday, while his sister carries on her underhand flirtation with another youth, Frank Stebbing, I suppose. It really was too preposterous, and Victoria said she had no doubt from the first that there was exaggeration, and had told Miss Elbury so ; but still she thought Gillian must have been to blame. She was very nice about it, and listened to all my explanation most kindly, as to Gillian's interest in the Whites, and its having been only the sister that she met, but plainly she is not half convinced. I heard something about a letter being left for Gillian, and really, I don't know whether there may not be more discoveries to come. I never felt before the force of our dear father's saying, *apropos* of Rotherwood himself, that no one knows what it is to lose a father except those who have the care of his children.'

'Whatever Gillian did was innocent and ladylike,

and nothing to be ashamed of,' said Aunt Jane stoutly ; ' of that I am sure. But I should like to be equally sure that she has not turned the head of that poor foolish young man, without in the least knowing what she was about. You should have seen her state of mind at his sending her a valentine, which she returned to him, perfectly ferociously, at once ; and that was all the correspondence somebody seems to have smelt out.'

' A valentine ! Gillian must have behaved very ill to have brought that upon herself ! Oh dear ! I wish she had never come here ; I wish Lily could have stayed at home, instead of scattering her children about the world. The Rotherwoods will never get over it.'

' That's the least part of the grievance, in my eyes,' said her sister. ' It won't make a fraction of difference to the dear old cousin Rotherwood ; and as to my Lady, it is always a liking from the teeth outwards.'

' How can you say so ! I am sure she has always been most cordial.'

' Most correct, if you please. Oh, did she say anything about Mysie ?'

' She said nothing but good of Mysie ; called her delightful, and perfectly good and trustworthy ; said they could never have got so well through Phyllis's illness without her, and that they only wished to keep her altogether.'

' I dare say, to be humble companion to my little lady, out of the way of her wicked sisters.'

‘Jane!’

‘My dear, I don’t think I can stand any more defence of her just now! No, she is an admirable woman, I know. That’s enough. I really must go to bed, and consider which is to be faced first, she or Kalliope.’

It was lucky that Miss Mohun could exist without much sleep, for she was far too much worried for any length of slumber to visit her that night, though she was afoot as early as usual. She thought it best to tell Gillian that Lady Rotherwood had heard some foolish reports, and that she was going to try to clear them up, and she extracted an explicit account as to what the extent of her intercourse with the Whites had been, which was given willingly, Gillian being in a very humble frame, and convinced that she had acted foolishly. It surprised her likewise that Aunt Adeline, whom she had liked the best, and thought the most good-natured, was so much more angry with her than Aunt Jane, who, as she felt, forgave her thoroughly, and was only anxious to help her out of the scrape she had made for herself.

Miss Mohun thought her best time for seeing Kalliope would be in the dinner-hour, and started accordingly in the direction of the marble works. Not far from them she met that young person walking quickly with one of her little brothers.

‘I was coming to see you,’ Miss Mohun said. ‘I did not know that you went home in the middle of the day.’

‘My mother has been so unwell of late that I do not like to be entirely out of reach all day,’ returned Kalliope, who certainly looked worn and sorrowful; ‘so I manage to run home, though it is but for a quarter of an hour.’

‘I will not delay you, I will walk with you;’ and when Petros had been dismissed, ‘I am afraid my niece has not been quite the friend to you that she intended.’

‘Oh, Miss Mohun, do you know all about it? It is such a relief! I have felt so guilty towards you, and yet I did not know what to do.’

‘I have never thought that the concealment was your fault,’ said Jane.

‘I did think at first that you knew,’ said Kalliope; ‘and when I found that was not the case, I suppose I should have insisted on your being told; but I could not bear to seem ungrateful, and my brother took such extreme delight in his lessons and Miss Merrifield’s kindness, that—that I could not bear to do what might prevent them. And now, poor fellow, it shows how wrong it was, since he has ventured on that unfortunate act of presumption, which has so offended her. Oh, Miss Mohun, he is quite broken-hearted.’

‘I am afraid Gillian was very discourteous. I was out, or it should not have been done so unkindly. Indeed, in the shock, Gillian did not recollect that she might be giving pain.’

‘Yes, yes! Poor Alexis! He has not had any opportunity of understanding how different things are

in your class of life, and he thought it would show his gratitude and—and—— Oh, he is so miserable !' and she was forced to stop to wipe away her tears.

'Poor fellow ! But it was one of those young men's mistakes that are got over and outgrown, so you need not grieve over it so much, my dear. My brother-in-law is on his way home, and I know he means to see what can be done for Alexis, for your father's sake.'

'Oh, Miss Mohun, how good you are ! I thought you could never forgive us. And people do say such shocking things.'

'I know they do, and therefore I am going to ask you to tell me exactly what intercourse there has been with Gillian.'

Kalliope did so, and Miss Mohun was struck with the complete accordance of the two accounts, and likewise by the total absence of all attempt at self-justification on Miss White's part. If she had in any way been weak, it had been against her will, and her position had been an exceedingly difficult one. She spoke in as guarded a manner as possible ; but to such acute and experienced ears as those of her auditor, it was impossible not to perceive that, while Gillian had been absolutely simple, and unconscious of all but a kind act of patronage, the youth's imagination had taken fire, and he had become her ardent worshipper ; with calf-love, no doubt, but with a distant, humble adoration, which had, whether fortunately or unfortunately, for once found expression in the valentine so summarily

rejected. The drawing and the composition had been the work of many days, and so much against his sister's protest that it had been sent without her knowledge, after she had thought it given up. She had only extracted the confession through his uncontrollable despair, which made him almost unfit to attend to his increased work, perhaps by his southern nature exaggerated.

'The stronger at first, the sooner over,' thought Miss Mohun; but she knew that consolation betraying her comprehension would not be safe.

One further discovery she made, namely, that on Sunday, Alexis, foolish lad, had been so wildly impatient at their having had no notice from Gillian since her return, that he had gone to the garden to explain, as he said, his sister's non-appearance there, since she was detained by her mother's illness. It was the only time he had ever been there, and he had met no one; but Miss Mohun felt a sinking of heart at the foreboding that the *mauvaises langues* would get hold of it.

The only thing to be decided on was that there must be a suspension of intercourse, at any rate, till Lady Merrifield's arrival; not in unkindness, but as best for all. And, indeed, Kalliope had no time to spare from her mother, whose bloated appearance, poor woman, was the effect of long-standing disease.

The daughter's heart was very full of her, and evidently it would have been a comfort to discuss her condition with this kind friend; but no more delay

was possible ; and Miss Mohun had to speed home, in a quandary how much or how little about Alexis's hopeless passion should be communicated to its object, and finally deciding that Gillian had better only be informed that he had been greatly mortified by the rude manner of rejection, but that the act itself proved that she must abstain from all renewal of the intercourse till her parents should return.

But that was not all the worry of the day. Miss Mohun had still to confront Lady Rotherwood ; and, going as soon as the early dinner was over, found the Marchioness resting after an inspection of houses in Rockquay. She did not like hotels, she said, and she thought the top of the cliff too bleak for Phyllis, so that they must move nearer the sea if the place agreed with her at all, which was doubtful. Miss Mohun was pretty well convinced that the true objection was the neighbourhood of Beechcroft Cottage. She said she had come to give some explanation of what had been said to her sister yesterday.

‘ Oh, my dear Jane, Adeline told me all about it yesterday. I am very sorry for you to have had such a charge ; but what could you expect of girls cast about as they have been, always with a marching regiment ? ’

‘ I do not think Mysie has given you any reason to think her ill brought up. ’

‘ A little uncouth at first ; but that was all. Oh, no ! Mysie is a dear little girl. I should be very

glad to have her with Phyllis altogether, and so would Rotherwood. But she was very young when Sir Jasper retired.'

'And Valetta was younger. Poor little girl! She was naughty; but I do not think she understood the harm of what she was doing.'

Lady Rotherwood smiled.

'Perhaps not; but she must have been deeply involved, since she was the one amongst all the guilty to be expelled.'

'Oh, Victoria! Was that what you heard?'

'Miss Elbury heard it from the governess she was under. Surely she was the only one not permitted to go up for the examination and removed.'

'True, but that was our doing—no decree of the High School. Her own governess is free now, and her mother on her way, and we thought she had better not begin another term. Yes, Victoria, I quite see that you might doubt her fitness to be much with Phyllis. I am not asking for that—I shall try to get her own governess to come at once; but for the child's sake and her mother's I should like to get this cleared up. May I see Miss Elbury?'

'Certainly; but I do not think you will find that she has exaggerated, though of course her informant may have done so.'

Miss Elbury was of the older generation of governesses, motherly, kind, but rather prim and precise, the accomplished element being supplied with diplomaed

foreigners, who, since Lady Phyllis's failure in health, had been dispensed with. She was a good and sensible woman, as Jane could see, in spite of the annoyance her report had occasioned, and it was impossible not to assent when she said she had felt obliged, under the circumstances, to mention to Lady Rotherwood what her cousin had told her.

'About both my nieces,' said Jane. 'Yes, I quite understand. But, though of course the little one's affair is the least important, we had better get to the bottom of that first, and I should like to tell you what really happened.'

She told her story, and how Valetta had been tempted and then bullied into going beyond the first peeps, and finding she did not produce the impression she wished, she begged Miss Elbury to talk it over with the head-mistress. It was all in the telling. Miss Elbury's young cousin, Miss Mellon, had been brought under rebuke, and into great danger of dismissal, through Valetta Merrifield's lapse; and it was no wonder that she had warned her kinswoman against 'the horrid little deceitful thing,' who had done so much harm to the whole class. 'Miss Mohun was running about over the whole place, but not knowing what went on in her own house!' And as to Miss White, Miss Elbury mentioned at last, though with some reluctance, that it was believed that she had been on the point of a private marriage, and of going to Italy with young Stebbing, when her machinations

were detected, and he was forced to set off without her.

With this in her mind, the governess could not be expected to accept as satisfactory what was not entire confutation or contradiction, and Miss Mohun saw that, politely as she was listened to, it was all only treated as excuse, since there could be no denial of Gillian's folly, and it was only a question of degree.

And, provoking as it was, the disappointment might work well for Valetta. The allegations against Gillian were a far more serious affair, but much more of these could be absolutely disproved and contradicted; in fact, all that Miss Mohun herself thought very serious, *i.e.* the flirtation element, was shown to be absolutely false, both as regarded Gillian and Kalliope; but it was quite another thing to convince people who knew none of the parties, when there was the residuum of truth undeniable, that there had been secret meetings not only with the girl, but the youth. To acquit Gillian of all but modern independence and imprudent philanthropy was not easy to any one who did not understand her character; and though Lady Rotherwood said nothing more in the form of censure, it was evident that she was unconvinced that Gillian was not a fast and flighty girl, and that she did not desire more contact than was necessary.

No doubt she wished herself farther off! Lord Rotherwood, she said, was coming down in a day or two, when he could get away, and then they should

decide whether to take a house or to go abroad, which, after all, might be the best thing for Phyllis.

‘He will make all the difference,’ said Miss Adeline, when the unsatisfactory conversation was reported to her.

‘I don’t know! But even if he did, and I don’t think he will, I won’t have Valetta waiting for his decision and admitted on sufferance.’

‘Shall you send her back to school?’

‘No. Poor Miss Vincent is free, and quite ready to come here. Fergus shall go and sleep among his fossils in the lumber-room, and I will write to her at once. She will be much better here than waiting at Silverton, though the Hacketts are very kind to her.’

‘Yes, it will be better to be independent. But all this is very unfortunate. However, Victoria will see for herself what the children are. She has asked me to take a drive with her to-morrow if it is not too cold.’

‘Oh yes, she is not going to make an estrangement. You need not fear that, Ada. She does not think it your fault.’

Aunt Jane pondered a little as to what to say to the two girls, and finally resolved that Valetta had better be told that she was not to do lessons with Fly, as her behaviour had made Lady Rotherwood doubt whether she was a good companion. Valetta stamped and cried, and said it was very hard and cross when she had been so sorry and every one had forgiven her;

but Gillian joined heartily with Aunt Jane in trying to make the child understand that consequences often come in spite of pardon and repentance. To Gillian herself, Aunt Jane said as little as possible, not liking even to give the veriest hint of the foolish gossip, or of the extent of poor Alexis White's admiration; for it was enough for the girl to know that concealment had brought her under a cloud, and she was chiefly concerned as to how her mother would look on it. She had something of Aunt Jane's impatience of patronage, and perhaps thought it snobbish to seem concerned at the great lady's displeasure.

Mysie was free to run in and out to her sisters, but was still to do her lessons with Miss Elbury, and Fly took up more of her time than the sisters liked. Neither she nor Fly were formally told why their castles vanished into empty air, but there certainly was a continual disappointment and fret on both sides, which Fly could not bear as well as when she was in high health, and poor Mysie's loving heart often found it hard to decide between her urgent claims and those of Valetta!

But was not mamma coming? and papa? Would not all be well then? Yes, hearts might bound at the thought. But where was Gillian's great thing?

Miss Vincent's coming was really like a beginning of home, in spite of her mourning and depressed look. It was a great consolation to the lonely woman to find how all her pupils flew at her, with

infinite delight. She had taken pains to bring a report of all the animals for Valetta, and she duly admired all Fergus's geological specimens, and even undertook to print labels for them.

Mysie would have liked to begin lessons again with her ; but this would have been hard on Fly, and besides, her mother had committed her to the Rotherwoods, and it was better still to leave her with them.

The aunts were ready with any amount of kindness and sympathy for the governess's bereavement, and her presence was a considerable relief in the various perplexities.

Even Lady Rotherwood and Miss Elbury had been convinced, and by no means unwillingly, that Gillian had been less indiscreet than had been their first impression ; but she had been a young lady of the period in her independence, and was therefore to be dreaded. No more garden trystes would have been possible under any circumstances, for the house and garden were in full preparation for the master, who was to meet Lord Rotherwood to consult about the proposed water-works and other designs for the benefit of the town where they were the chief landowners.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PARTNER

THE expected telegram arrived two days later, requesting Miss Mohun to find a lodging at Rockstone sufficient to contain Sir Jasper and Lady Merrifield, and a certain amount of sons and daughters, while they considered what was to be done about Silverfold.

‘So you and I will go out house-hunting, Gillian?’ said Aunt Jane, when she had opened it, and the exclamations were over.

‘I am afraid there is no house large enough up here,’ said her sister.

‘No, it is an unlucky time, in the thick of the season.’

‘Victoria said she had been looking at some houses in Bellevue.’

‘I am afraid she will have raised the prices of them.’

‘But, oh, Aunt Jane, we couldn’t go to Bellevue Church!’ cried Gillian.

‘Your mother would like to be so near the daily services at the Kennel,’ said Miss Mohun. ‘Yes, we

must begin with those houses. There's nothing up here but Sorrento, and I have heard enough of its deficiencies !'

At that moment in came a basket of game, grapes, and flowers, with Lady Rotherwood's compliments.

'Solid pudding,' muttered Miss Mohun. 'In this case, I should almost prefer empty praise. Look here, Ada, what a hamper they must have had from home ! I think I shall, as I am going that way, take a pheasant and some grapes to the poor Queen of the White Ants ; I believe she is really ill, and it will show that we do not want to neglect them.'

'Oh, thank you, Aunt Jane !' cried Gillian, the colour rising in her face ; and she was the willing bearer of the basket as she walked down the steps with her aunt, and along the esplanade, only pausing to review the notices of palatial, rural, and desirable villas in the house-agent's window, and to consider in what proportion their claims to perfection might be reduced.

As they turned down Ivinghoe Terrace, and were approaching the rusty garden-gate, they overtook Mrs. Lee, the wife of the organist of St. Kenelm's, who lodged at Mrs. White's. In former times, before her marriage, Mrs. Lee had been a Sunday-school teacher at St. Andrew's, and though party spirit considered her to have gone over to the enemy, there were old habits of friendly confidence between her and Miss Mohun, and there was an exchange of friendly greetings and inquiries. When she understood their errand she

rejoiced in it, saying that poor Mrs. White was very poorly, and rather fractious, and that this supply would be most welcome both to her and her daughter.

‘Ah, I am afraid that poor girl goes through a great deal!’

‘Indeed she does, Miss Mohun; and a better girl never lived. I cannot think how she can bear up as she does; there she is at the office all day with her work, except when she runs home in the middle of the day—all that distance to dish up something her mother can taste, for there’s no dependence on the girl, nor on little Maura neither. Then she is slaving early and late to keep the house in order as well as she can, when her mother is fretting for her attention; and I believe she loses more than half her night’s rest over the old lady. How she bears up, I cannot guess; and never a cross word to her mother, who is such a trial, nor to the boys, but looking after their clothes and their lessons, and keeping them as good and nice as can be. I often say to my husband, I am sure it is a lesson to live in the house with her.’

‘I am sure she is an excellent girl,’ said Miss Mohun. ‘I wish we could do anything to help her.’

‘I know you are a real friend, Miss Mohun, and never was there any young person who was in greater need of kindness; though it is none of her fault. She can’t help her face, poor dear; and she has never given any occasion, I am sure, but has been as guarded and correct as possible.’

‘Oh, I was in hopes that annoyance was suspended at least for a time!’

‘You are aware of it then, Miss Mohun? Yes, the young gentleman is come back, not a bit daunted. Yesterday evening what does he do but drive up in a cab with a great bouquet, and a basketful of grapes, and what not! Poor Kally, she ran in to me, and begged me as a favour to come downstairs with her, and I could do no less. And I assure you, Miss Mohun, no queen could be more dignified, nor more modest than she was in rejecting his gifts, and keeping him in check. Poor dear, when he was gone she burst out crying—a thing I never knew of her before; not that she cared for him, but she felt it a cruel wrong to her poor mother to send away the grapes she longed after; and so she will feel these just a providence.’

‘Then is Mrs. White confined to her room?’

‘For more than a fortnight. For that matter the thing was easier, for she had encouraged the young man as far as in her lay, poor thing, though my husband and young Alexis both told her what they knew of him, and that it would not be for Kally’s happiness, let alone the offence to his father.’

‘Then it really went as far as that?’

‘Miss Mohun, I would be silent as the grave if I did not know that the old lady went talking here and there, never thinking of the harm she was doing. She was so carried away by the idea of making a lady of

Kally. She says she was a beauty herself, though you would not think it now, and she is perfectly puffed up about Kally. So she actually lent an ear when the young man came persuading Kally to get married and go off to Italy with him, where he made sure he could come over Mr. White with her beauty and relationship and all—among the myrtle groves—that was his expression—where she would have an association worthy of her. I don't quite know how he meant it to be brought about, but he is one who would stick at nothing, and of course Kally would not hear of it, and answered him so as one would think he would never have had the face to address her again; but poor Mrs. White has done nothing but fret over it, and blame her daughter for undutifulness, and missing the chance of making all their fortunes—breaking her heart and her health, and I don't know what besides. She is half a foreigner, you see, and does not understand, and she is worse than no one to that poor girl.'

'And you say he is come back as bad as ever.'

'Or worse, you may say, Miss Mohun; absence seems only to have set him the more upon her, and I am afraid that Mrs. White's talk, though it may not have been to many, has been enough to set it about the place; and in cases like that, it is always the poor young woman as gets the blame—especially with the gentleman's own people.'

'I am afraid so.'

'And you see she is in a manner at his mercy,

being son to one of the heads of the firm, and in a situation of authority.'

'What can she do all day at the office?'

'She keeps one or two of the other young ladies working with her,' said Mrs. Lee; 'but if any change could be made, it would be very happy for her; though, after all, I do not see how she could leave this place, the house being family property, and Mr. White their relation, besides that Mrs. White is in no state to move; but, on the other hand, Mr. and Mrs. Stebbing know their son is after her, and the lady would not stick at believing or saying anything against her, though I will always bear witness, and so will Mr. Lee, that never was there a more good, right-minded young woman, or more prudent and guarded.'

'So would Mr. Flight and his mother, I have no doubt.'

'Mr. Flight would, Miss Mohun, but'—with an odd look—'I fancy my lady thinks poor Kally too handsome for it to be good for a young clergyman to have much to say to her. They have not been so cordial to them of late, but that is partly owing to poor Mrs. White's foolish talk, and in part to young Alexis having been desultory and mopy of late—not taking the interest in his music he did. Mr. Lee says he is sure some young woman is at the bottom of it.'

Miss Mohun saw her niece's ears crimson under her hat, and was afraid Mrs. Lee would likewise see them. They had reached the front of the house, and

she made haste to take out a visiting-card and to beg Mrs. Lee kindly to give it with the basket, saying that she would not give trouble by coming to the door.

And then she turned back with Gillian, who was in a strange tumult of shame and consternation, yet withal, feeling that first strange thrill of young womanhood at finding itself capable of stirring emotion, and too much overcome by these strange sensations—above all by the shock of shame—to be able to utter a word.

I must make light of it, but not too light, thought Miss Mohun, and she broke the ice by saying, ‘Poor foolish boy——’

‘Oh, Aunt Jane, what shall I do?’

‘Let it alone, my dear.’

‘But that I should have done so much harm and upset him so’—in a voice betraying a certain sense of being flattered. ‘Can’t I do anything to undo it?’

‘Certainly not. To be perfectly quiet and do nothing is all you can do. My dear, boys and young men have such foolish fits—more in that station than in ours, because they have none of the public school and college life which keeps people out of it. You were the first lady this poor fellow was brought into contact with, and—well, you were rather a goose, and he has been a greater one; but if he is let alone, he will recover and come to his senses. I could tell you of men who have had dozens of such fits. I am much more interested about his sister. What a noble girl she is!’

‘Oh, isn’t she, Aunt Jane. Quite a real heroine! And now mamma is coming, she will know what to do for her!’

‘I hope she will, but it is a most perplexing case altogether.’

‘And that horrid young Stebbing is come back too. I am glad she has that nice Mrs. Lee to help her.’

‘And to defend her,’ added Miss Mohun. ‘Her testimony is worth a great deal, and I am glad to know where to lay my hand upon it. And here is our first house, “*Les Rochers*.” For Madame de Sévigné’s sake, I hope it will do!’

But it didn’t! Miss Mohun got no farther than the hall before she detected a scent of gas; and they had to betake themselves to the next vacant abode. The investigating nature had full scope in the various researches that she made into parlour, kitchen, and hall, desperately wearisome to Gillian, whose powers were limited to considering how the family could sit at ease in the downstairs rooms, how they could be stowed away in the bedrooms, and where there were the prettiest views of the bay. Aunt Jane, becoming afraid that while she was literally ‘ferreting’ in the offices Gillian might be meditating on her conquest, picked up the first cheap book that looked innocently sensational, and left her to study it on various sofas. And when daylight failed for inspections, Gillian still had reason to rejoice in the pastime devised for her, since there was an endless discussion at the agent’s,

over the only two abodes that could be made available, as to prices, repairs, time, and terms. They did not get away till it was quite dark and the gas lighted, and Miss Mohun did not think the ascent of the steps desirable, so that they went round by the street.

‘I declare,’ exclaimed Miss Mohun, ‘there’s Mr. White’s house lighted up. He must be come!’

‘I wonder whether he will do anything for Kalliope,’ sighed Gillian.

‘Oh, Jenny,’ exclaimed Miss Adeline, as the two entered the drawing-room. ‘You have had such a loss; Rotherwood has been here waiting to see you for an hour, and such an agreeable man he brought with him!’

‘Who could it have been?’

‘I didn’t catch his name — Rotherwood was mumbling in his quick way — indeed, I am not sure he did not think I knew him. A distinguished-looking man, like a picture, with a fine white beard, and he was fresh from Italy; told me all about the Carnival and the curious ceremonies in the country villages.’

‘From Italy? It can’t have been Mr. White.’

‘Mr. White! My dear Jane! this was a gentleman — quite a grand-looking man. He might have been an Italian nobleman, only he spoke English too well for that, though I believe those diplomates can speak all languages. However, you will see, for we are to go and dine with them at eight o’clock — you, and I, and Gillian.’

‘ You, Ada ! ’

‘ Oh ! I have ordered the chair round ; it won’t hurt me with the glasses up. Gillian, my dear, you must put on the white dress that Mrs. Grinstead’s maid did up for you—it is quite simple, and I should like you to look nice ! Well—oh, how tired you both look ! Ring for some fresh tea, Gillian. Have you found a house ? ’

So excited and occupied was Adeline that the house-hunting seemed to have assumed quite a subordinate place in her mind. It really was an extraordinary thing for her to dine out, though this was only a family party next door ; and she soon sailed away to hold counsel with Mrs. Mount on dresses and wraps, and to get her very beautiful hair dressed. She made by far the most imposing appearance of the three when they shook themselves out in the ante-room at the hotel, in her softly-tinted sheeny pale-gray dress, with pearls in her hair, and two beautiful blush roses in her bosom ; while her sister, in black satin and coral, somehow seemed smaller than ever, probably from being tired, and from the same cause Gillian had dark marks under her brown eyes, and a much more limp and languid look than was her wont.

Fly was seated on her father’s knee, looking many degrees better and brighter, as if his presence were an elixir of life ; and when he put her down to greet the arrivals, both she and Mysie sprang to Gillian to ask the result of the quest of houses. The distinguished

friend was there, and was talking to Lady Rotherwood about Italian progress, and there was only time for an inquiry and reply as to the success of the search for a house before dinner was announced—the little girls disappeared, and the Marquess gave his arm to his eldest cousin.

‘Grand specimen of marble, isn’t he?’ he muttered.

‘Ada hasn’t the least idea who he is. She thinks him a great diplomate,’ communicated Jane in return, and her arm received an ecstatic squeeze.

It was amusing to Jane Mohun to see how much like a dinner at Rotherwood this contrived to be, with my lady’s own footman, and my lord’s valet waiting in state. She agreed mentally with her sister that the other guest was a very fine-looking man, with a picturesque head, and he did not seem at all out of place or ill-at-ease in the company in which he found himself. Lord Rotherwood, with a view, perhaps, to prolonging Adeline’s mystification, turned the conversation to Italian politics, and the present condition and the industries of the people, on all of which subjects much ready information was given in fluent, good English, with perhaps rather unnecessarily fine words. It was only towards the end of the dinner that a personal experience was mentioned about the impossibility of getting work done on great feast days, or of knowing which were the greater—and the great dislike of the peasant mind to new methods.

When it came to ‘At first, I had to superintend

every blasting with gelatine,' the initiated were amused at the expression of Adeline's countenance, and the suppressed start of frightful conviction that quivered on her eyelids and the corners of her mouth, though kept in check by good breeding, and then smoothed out into a resolute complacency, which convinced her sister that having inadvertently exalted the individual into the category of the distinguished, she meant to abide staunchly by her first impression.

Lady Rotherwood, like most great ladies in public life, was perfectly well accustomed to have all sorts of people brought home to dinner, and would have been far less astonished than her cousins at sitting down with her grocer; but she gave the signal rather early, and on reaching the sitting-room, where Miss Elworthy was awaiting them, said—

'We will leave them to discuss their water-works at their ease. Certainly residence abroad is an excellent education.'

'A very superior man,' said Adeline.

'Those self-made men always are.'

'In the nature of things,' added Miss Mohun, 'or they would not have mounted.'

'It is the appendages that are distressing,' said Lady Rotherwood, 'and they seldom come in one's way. Has this man left any in Italy?'

'Oh no; none alive. He took his wife there for her health, and that was the way he came to set up his Italian quarries; but she and his child both died

there long ago, and he has never come back to this place since,' explained Ada.

'But he has relations here,' said Jane. 'His cousin was an officer in Jasper Merrifield's regiment.'

She hoped to have been saying a word in the cause of the young people, but she regretted her attempt, for Lady Rotherwood replied—

'I have heard of them. A very undeserving family, are they not?'

Gillian, whom Miss Elworthy was trying to entertain, heard, and could not help colouring all over, face, neck, and ears, all the more for so much hating the flush and feeling it observed.

Miss Mohun's was a very decided, 'I should have said quite the reverse.'

'Indeed! Well, I heard the connection lamented, for his sake, by—what was her name? Mrs. Stirling—or——'

'Mrs. Stebbing,' said Adeline. 'You don't mean that she has actually called on you?'

'Is there any objection to her?' asked Lady Rotherwood, with a glance to see whether the girl was listening.

'Oh no, no! only he is a mere mason—or quarryman, who has grown rich,' said Adeline.

The hostess gave a little dry laugh.

'Is that all? I thought you had some reason for disapproving of her. I thought her rather sensible and pleasing.'

Cringing and flattering, thought Jane; and that is just what these magnificent ladies like in the wide field of inferiors. But aloud she could not help saying, 'My principal objection to Mrs. Stebbing is that I have always thought her rather a gossip—on the scandalous side.' Then, bethinking herself that it would not be well to pursue the subject in Gillian's presence, she explained where the Stebbings lived, and asked how long Lord Rotherwood could stay.

'Only over Sunday. He is going to look over the place to-morrow, and next day there is to be a public meeting about it. I am not sure that we shall not go with him. I do not think the place agrees with Phyllis.'

The last words were spoken just as the two gentlemen had come in from the dining-room, rather sooner than was expected, and they were taken up.

'Agrees with Phyllis! She looks pounds—nay, hundredweights better than when we left home. I mean to have her down to-morrow on the beach for a lark—castle-building, paddling—with Mysie and Val, and Fergus and all. That's what would set her up best, wouldn't it, Jane?'

Jane gave a laughing assent, wondering how much of this would indeed prove castle-building, though adding that Fergus was at school, and that it was not exactly the time of year for paddling.

'Oh, ah, eh! Well, perhaps not—forestalling sweet St. Valentine—stepping into their nests they paddled. Though St. Valentine is past, and I though

our fortunes had been made, Mr. White, by calling this the English Naples, and what not.'

'Those are the puffs, my lord. There is a good deal of difference even between this and Rocca Marina, which is some way up the mountain.'

'It must be very beautiful,' said Miss Ada.

'Well, Miss Mohun, people do say it is striking.' And he was drawn into describing the old Italian mansion, purchased on the extinction of an ancient family of nobles, perched up on the side of a mountain, whose feet the sea laved, with a terrace whence there was a splendid view of the Gulf of Genoa, and fine slopes above and below of chestnut-trees and vineyards; and therewith he gave a hearty invitation to the company present to visit him there if ever they went to Italy, when he would have great pleasure in showing them many bits of scenery, and curious remains that did not fall in the way of ordinary tourists.

Lady Rotherwood gratefully said she should remember the invitation if they went to the south, as perhaps they should do that very spring.

'And,' said Ada, 'you are not to be expected to remain long in this climate when you have a home like that awaiting you.'

'Don't call it home, Miss Mohun,' he said. 'I have not had that these many years; but I declare, the first sound of our county dialect, when I got out at the station, made my heart leap into my mouth. I could have shaken hands with the fellow.'

‘Then I hope you will remain here for some time. There is much wanting to be set going,’ said Jane.

‘So I thought of doing, and I had out a young fellow, who I thought might take my place—my partner’s son, young Stebbing. They wrote that he had been learning Italian, with a view to being useful to me, and so on ; but when he came out, what was he but a fine gentleman—never had put his hand to a pick, nor a blasting-iron ; and as to his Italian, he told me it was the Italian of Alfieri and Leopardi. Leopard’s Italian it might be, for it was a very mottled or motley tongue, but he might as well have talked English or Double-Dutch to our hands, or better, for they had picked up the meaning of some orders from me before I got used to their lingo. And then he says ’tis office work and superintendence he understands. How can you superintend, I told him, what you don’t know yourself ? No, no ; go home and bring a pair of hands fit for a quarryman, before I make you overlooker.’

This was rather delightful, and it further appeared that he could answer all Jane’s inquiries after her beloved promising lads whom he had deported to the Rocca Marina quarries. They were evidently kindly looked after, and she began to perceive that it was not such a bad place after all for them, more especially as he was in the act of building them a chapel, and one of his objects in coming to England was to find a chaplain ; and as Lord Rotherwood said, he had come to the right shop, since Rockquay in the spring was likely to afford

a choice of clergy with weak chests, or better still, with weak-chested wives, to whom light work in a genial climate would be the greatest possible boon.

Altogether the evening was very pleasant, only too short. It was a curious study for Jane Mohun how far Lady Rotherwood would give way to her husband. She always seemed to give way, but generally accomplished her own will in the end; and it was little likely that she would allow the establishment to await the influx of Merrifields, though certainly Gillian had done nothing displeasing all that evening except that terrible blushing, for which piece of ingenuousness her aunt loved her all the better.

At half-past ten next morning, however, Lord Rotherwood burst in to borrow Valetta for a donkey-ride, for which his lady had compounded instead of the paddling and castle-building, and certainly poor Val could not do much to corrupt Fly on donkey back, and in his presence. He further routed out Gillian, nothing loth, from her algebra, bidding her put on her seven-leagued boots, and not get bent double—and he would fain have seized on his cousin Jane, but she was already gone off for an interview with the landlord of the most eligible of the two houses.

Gillian and Valetta came back very rosy, and in fits of merriment. Lord Rotherwood had paid the donkey-boys to stay at home, and let him and Gillian take their place. They had gone out on the common above the town, with most amusing rivalries as to

which drove the beast *worst*, making Mysie umpire. Then having attained a delightfully lonely place, Fly had begged for a race with Valetta, which failed, partly because Val's donkey would not stir, and partly because Fly could not bear the shaking; and then Lord Rotherwood himself insisted on riding the donkey that wouldn't go, and racing Gillian on the donkey that would—and he made his go so effectually that it ran away with him, and he pulled it up at last only just in time to save himself from being ignominiously stopped by an old fishwoman!

He had, as Aunt Jane said, regularly dipped Gill back into childhood, and she looked, spoke, and moved all the better for it.

CHAPTER XV

THE ROCKS OF ROCKSTONE

LORD ROTHERWOOD came in to try to wile his cousin to share in the survey of the country ; but she declared it to be impossible, as all her avocations had fallen into arrear, and she had to find a couple of servants as well as a house for the Merrifields. This took her in the direction of the works, and Gillian proposed to go with her as far as the Giles's, there to sit a little while with Lilian, for whom she had a new book.

‘My dear, surely you must be tired out!’ exclaimed the stay-at-home aunt.

‘Oh no, Aunt Ada! Quite freshened by that blow on the common.’

And Miss Mohun was not sorry, thinking that to leave Gillian free to come home by herself would be the best refutation of Mrs. Mount's doubts of her.

They had not, however, gone far on their way—on the walk rather unfrequented at this time of day—before Gillian exclaimed, ‘Is that Kally? Oh! and who is that with her?’ For there certainly was a figure in somewhat close proximity, the ulster and

pork-pie hat being such as to make the gender doubtful.

‘How late she is! I am afraid her mother is worse,’ said Miss Mohun, quickening her steps a little; and, at the angle of the road, the pair in front perceived them. Kalliope turned towards them; the companion—about whom there was no doubt by that time—gave a petulant motion and hastened out of sight.

In another moment they were beside Kalliope, who looked shaken and trembling, with tears in her eyes, which sprang forth at the warm pressure of her hand.

‘I am afraid Mrs. White is not so well,’ said Miss Mohun kindly.

‘She is no worse, I think, thank you; but I was delayed. Are you going this way? May I walk with you?’

‘I will come with you to the office,’ said Miss Mohun, perceiving that she was in great need of an escort and protector.

‘Oh, thank you, thank you, if it is not too much out of your way.’

A few more words passed about Mrs. White’s illness and what advice she was having. Miss Mohun could not help thinking that the daughter did not quite realise the extent of the illness, for she added—

‘It was a good deal on the nerves and mind. She was so anxious about Mr. James White’s arrival.’

‘Have you not seen him?’

‘Oh no! Not yet.’

‘I think you will be agreeably surprised,’ said Gillian. And here they left her at Mrs. Giles’s door.

‘Yes,’ added Miss Mohun, ‘he gave me the idea of a kind, just man.’

‘Miss Mohun,’ said the poor girl, as soon as they were *tête-à-tête*, ‘I know you are very good. Will you tell me what I ought to do? You saw just now——’

‘I did; and I have heard.’

Her face was all in a flame and her voice choked.

‘He says—Mr. Frank does—that his mother has found out, and that she will tell her own story to Mr. White; and—and we shall all get the sack, as he calls it; and it will be utter misery, and he will not stir a finger to vindicate me; but if I will listen to him, he will speak to Mr. White, and bear me through; but I can’t—I can’t. I know he is a bad man; I know how he treated poor Edith Vane. I never can; and how shall I keep out of his way?’

‘My poor child,’ said Miss Mohun, ‘it is a terrible position for you; but you are doing quite right. I do not believe Mr. White would go much by what that young man says, for I know he does not think highly of him.’

‘But he does go altogether by Mr. Stebbing—together; and I know he—Mr. Stebbing, I mean—can’t bear us, and would not keep us on if he could help it. He has been writing for another designer—an artist—instead of me.’

‘Still, you would be glad to have the connection severed?’

‘Oh yes, I should be glad enough to be away; but what would become of my mother and the children?’

‘Remember your oldest friends are on their way home; and I will try to speak to Mr. White myself.’

They had reached the little door of Kalliope’s office, which she could open with a latch-key, and Miss Mohun was just about to say some parting words, when there was a sudden frightful rumbling sound, something between a clap of thunder and the carting of stones, and the ground shook under their feet, while a cry went up—loud, horror-struck men and women’s voices raised in dismay.

Jane had heard that sound once before. It was the fall of part of the precipitous cliff, much of which had been quarried away. But in spite of all precautions, frost and rain were in danger of loosening the remainder, and wire fences were continually needing to be placed to prevent the walking above on edges that might be perilous.

Where was it? What had it done? was the instant thought. Kalliope turned as pale as death; the girls came screaming and thronging out of their workshop, the men from their sheds, the women from the cottages, as all thronged to the more open space beyond the buildings where they could see, while Miss Mohun found herself clasped by her trembling niece.

Others were rushing up from the wharf. One

moment's glance showed all familiar with the place that a projecting point, forming a sort of cusp in the curve of the bay, had gone, and it lay, a great shattered mass, fragments spreading far and wide, having crashed through the roof of a stable that stood below.

There was a general crowding forward to the spot, and crying and exclamation, and a shouting of 'All right' from above and below. Had 'any one come down with it? A double horror seized Miss Mohun as she remembered that her cousin was to inspect those parts that very afternoon.

She caught at the arm of a man and demanded, 'Was any one up there?'

'Master's there, and some gentlemen; but they bain't brought down with it,' said the man. 'Don't be afraid, miss. Thank the Lord, no one was under the rock—horses even out at work.'

'Thank God, indeed!' exclaimed Miss Mohun, daring now to look up, and seeing, not very distinctly, some figures of men, who, however, were too high up and keeping too far from the dangerous broken edge for recognition.

Room was made for the two ladies, by the men who knew Miss Mohun, to push forward, so as to have a clearer view of the broken wall and roof of the stable, and the great ruddy blue and white veined mass of limestone rock, turf, and bush adhering to what had been the top.

There was a moment's silence through the crowd, a kind of awe at the spectacle and the possibilities that had been mercifully averted.

Then one of the men said—

‘That was how it was. I saw one of them above—not Stebbing—No—coming out to the brow; and after this last frost, not a doubt but that must have been enough to bring it down.’

‘Not railed off, eh?’ said the voice of young Stebbing from among the crowd.

‘Well, it were marked with big stones where the rail should go,’ said another. ‘I know, for I laid ’em myself; but there weren’t no orders given.’

‘There weren’t no stones either. Some one been and took ’em away,’ added the first speaker.

‘I see how it is,’ Frank Stebbing’s metallic voice could plainly be heard, flavoured with an oath. ‘This is your neglect, White, droning, stuck-up sneak as you always were and will be! I shall report this. Damage to property, and maybe life, all along of your con-founded idleness.’

And there were worse imprecations, which made Miss Mohun break out in a tone of shocked reproof—

‘Mr. Stebbing!’

‘I beg your pardon, Miss Mohun; I was not aware of your presence——’

‘Nor of a Higher One,’ she could not help interposing, while he went on justifying himself.

‘It is the only way to speak to these fellows; and

it is enough to drive one mad to see what comes of the neglect of a conceited young ass above his business. Life and property——’

‘But life is safe, is it not?’ she interrupted with a shudder.

‘Ay, ay, ma’am,’ said the voice of the workman, ‘or we should know it by this time.’

But at that moment a faint, gasping cry caught Jane’s ear.

Others heard it too. It was a child’s voice, and grew stronger after a moment. It came from the corner of the shed outside the stable.

‘Oh, oh!’ cried the women, pressing forward, ‘the poor little Fields!’

Then it was recollected that Mrs. Field—one of those impracticable women on whom the shafts of school officers were lost, and who was always wandering in the town—had been seen going out, leaving two small children playing about, the younger under the charge of the elder. The father was a carter, and had been sent on some errand with the horses.

This passed while anxious hands were struggling with stones and earth, foremost among them Alexis White. The utmost care was needful to prevent the superincumbent weight from falling in and crushing the life there certainly was beneath, happily not the rock from above, but some of the *débris* of the stable. Frank Stebbing and the foreman had to drive back anxious crowds, and keep a clear space.

Then came running, shrieking, pushing her way through the men, the poor mother, who had to be forcibly withheld by Miss Mohun and one of the men from precipitating herself on the pile of rubbish where her children were buried, and so shaking it as to make their destruction certain.

Those were terrible moments; but when the mother's voice penetrated to the children, a voice answered—

‘Mammy, mammy, get us out; there’s a stone on Tommy,’—at least so the poor woman understood the lisplings, almost stifled; and she shrieked again, ‘Mammy’s coming, darlings!’

The time seemed endless, though it was probably only a few minutes before it was found that the children were against the angle of the shed, where the wall and a beam had protected the younger, a little girl of five, who seemed to be unhurt. But, alas! though the boy’s limbs were not crushed, a heavy stone had fallen on his temple.

The poor woman would not believe that life was gone. She disregarded the little one, who screamed for mammy and clutched her skirts, in spite of the attempts of the women to lift her up and comfort her; and gathering the poor lifeless boy in her arms, she alternately screamed for the doctor and uttered coaxing, caressing calls to the child.

She neither heard nor heeded Miss Mohun, with whom, indeed, her relations had not been agreeable

and as a young surgeon, sniffing the accident from afar, had appeared on the scene, and had, at the first glance, made an all too significant gesture, Jane thought it safe to leave the field to him and a kind, motherly, good neighbour, who promised her to send up to Beehcroft Cottage in case there was anything to be done for the unhappy woman or the poor father. Mr. Hablot, who now found his way to the spot, promised to walk on and prepare him: he was gone with a marble cross to a churchyard some five miles off.

Gillian had not spoken a word all this time. She felt perfectly stunned and bewildered, as if it was a dream, and she could not understand it. Only for a moment did she see the bleeding face and prone limbs of the poor boy, and that sent a shuddering horror over her, so that she felt like fainting; but she had so much recollection and self-consciousness, that horror of causing a sensation and giving trouble sent the blood back to her heart, and she kept her feet by holding hard to her aunt's arm; and presently Miss Mohun felt how tight and trembling was the grasp, and then saw how white she was.

‘My dear, we must get home directly,’ she said kindly. ‘Lean on me—there.’

There was leisure now, as they turned away, for others to see the young lady's deadly paleness, and there were invitations to houses and offers of all succours at hand; but the dread of ‘a fuss’ further revived Gillian, and all that was accepted was a seat

for a few moments and a glass of water, which Aunt Jane needed almost as much as she did.

Though the girl's colour was coming back, and she said she could walk quite well, both had such aching knees and such shaken limbs that they were glad to hold by each other as they mounted the sloping road, and half-way up Gillian came to a sudden stop.

'Aunt Jane,' she said, panting and turning pale again, 'you heard that dreadful man. Oh! do you think it was true? Fergus's bit of spar—Alexis not minding. Oh! then it is all our doing!'

'I can't tell. Don't you think about it now,' said Aunt Jane, feeling as if the girl were going to swoon on the spot in the shock. 'Consequences are not in our hands. Whatever it came from, and very sad it was, there was great mercy, and we have only to thank God it was no worse.'

When at last aunt and niece reached home, they had no sooner opened the front door than Adeline came almost rushing out of the drawing-room.

'Oh! my dearest Jane,' she cried, clasping and kissing her sister, 'wasn't it dreadful? Where were you? Mr. White knows no one was hurt below, but I could not be easy till you came in.'

'Mr. White!'

'Yes; Mr. White was so kind as to come and tell me—and about Rotherwood.'

'What about Rotherwood?' exclaimed Miss Mohun,

advancing into the drawing-room, where Mr. White had risen from his seat.

‘ Nothing to be alarmed about. Indeed, I assure you, his extraordinary presence of mind and agility——’

‘ What was it ? ’ as she and Gillian each sank into a chair, the one breathless, the other with the faintness renewed by the fresh shock, but able to listen as Mr. White told first briefly, then with more detail, how—as the surveying party proceeded along the path at the top of the cliffs, he and Lord Rotherwood comparing recollections of the former outline, now much changed by quarrying—the marquis had stepped out to a slightly projecting point ; Mr. Stebbing had uttered a note of warning, knowing how liable these promontories were to break away in the end of winter, and happily Lord Rotherwood had turned and made a step or two back, when the rock began to give way under his feet, so that, being a slight and active man, a spring and bound forward had actually carried him safely to the firm ground, and the others, who had started back in self-preservation, then in horror, fully believing him borne down to destruction, saw him the next instant lying on his face on the path before them. When on his feet, he had declared himself unhurt, and solely anxious as to what the fall of rock might have done beneath ; but he was reassured by those cries of ‘ All right ’ which were uttered before the poor little Fields were discovered ; and then, when the party were going to make their way down to inspect the effects of the catastrophe,

he had found that he had not escaped entirely unhurt. Of course he had been forced to leap with utter want of heed, only as far and wide as he could, and thus, though he had lighted on his feet, he had fallen against a stone, and pain and stiffness of shoulder made themselves apparent; though he would accept no help in walking back to the hotel, and was only anxious not to frighten his wife and daughter, and desired Mr. White, who had volunteered to go, to tell the ladies next door that he was convinced it was nothing, or, if anything, only a trifle of a collar-bone. Mr. White had, since the arrival of the surgeon, made an expedition of inquiry, and heard this verdict confirmed, with the further assurance that there was no cause for anxiety. The account of the damage and disaster below was new to him, as his partner had declared the stables to be certain to be empty, and moreover in need of being rebuilt; and he departed to find Mr. Stebbing and make inquiries.

Miss Mohun, going to the hotel, saw the governess, and heard that all was going on well, and that Lord Rotherwood insisted that nothing was the matter, and would not hear of going to bed, but was lying on the sofa in the sitting-room. Her ladyship presently came out, and confirmed the account; but Jane agreed with her that, if possible, the knowledge of the poor child's death should be kept from him that night, lest the shock should make him feverish. However, in that very moment when she was off guard, the communica-

tion had been made by his valet, only too proud to have something to tell, and with the pleasing addition that Miss Mohun had had a narrow escape. Whereupon ensued an urgent message to Miss Mohun to come and tell him all about it.

Wife and cousin exchanged glances of consternation, and perhaps each knew she might be thankful that he did not come himself instead of sending, and yet feared that the abstinence was a proof more of incapacity than of submission.

Lying there in a dressing-gown over a strapped shoulder, he showed his agitation by being more than usually unable to finish a sentence.

‘Jenny, Jenny—you are—are you all safe? not frightened?’

‘Oh no, no; I was a great way off; I only heard the noise, and I did not know you were there.’

‘Ah! there must be—something must be meant for me to do. Heaven must mean—thank Him! But is it true—a poor child? Can’t one ever be foolish without hurting more than one’s self?’

Jane told him the truth calmly and quietly, explaining that the survivor was entirely unhurt, and the poor little victim could not have suffered; adding with all her heart, ‘The whole thing was full of mercy, and I do not think you need blame yourself for heedlessness, for it was an accident that the place was not marked.’

‘Shameful neglect,’ said Lady Rotherwood.

‘The partner—what’s-his-name—Stebbing—said

something about his son being away. An untrustworthy substitute, wasn't there?' said Lord Rotherwood.

'The son was the proficient in Leopardine Italian we heard of last night,' said Jane. 'I don't know what he may be as an overlooker here. He certainly fell furiously on the substitute, a poor cousin of Mr. White's own; but I am much afraid the origin of the mischief was nearer home—Master Fergus's geological researches.'

'Fergus! Why, he is a mite.'

'Yes, but Maurice *encore*. However, I must find out from him whether this is only a foreboding of my prophetic soul!'

'Curious cattle,' observed Lord Rotherwood.

'Well,' put in his wife, 'I do not think Ivinghoe has ever given us cause for anxiety.'

'Exactly the reason that I am always expecting him to break out in some unexpected place! No, Victoria,' he added, seeing that she did not like this, 'I am quite ready to allow that we have a model son, and I only pity him for not having a model father.'

'Well, I am not going to stay and incite you to talk nonsense,' said Jane, rising to depart; 'I will let you know my discoveries.'

She found Fergus watching for her at the gate, with the appeal, 'Aunt Jane, there's been a great downfall of cliff, and I want to see what formations it has brought to light; but they won't let me through to look at it, though I told them White always did.'

‘I do not suppose that they will allow any one to meddle with it at present,’ said Aunt Jane; then, as Fergus made an impatient exclamation, she added, ‘Do you know that a poor little boy was killed, and Cousin Rotherwood a good deal hurt?’

‘Yes,’ said Fergus; ‘Big Blake said so.’

‘And now, Fergus, I want to know where you took that large stone from that you showed me with the crack of spar.’

‘With the micaceous crystals,’ corrected Fergus. ‘It was off the top of that very cliff that fell down, so I am sure there must be more in it; and some one else will get them if they won’t let me go and see for them.’

‘And Alexis White gave you leave to take it?’

‘Oh yes, I always ask him.’

‘Were you at the place when you asked him, Fergus?’

‘At the place on the cliff? No. For I couldn’t find him for a long time, and I carried it all the way down the steps.’

‘And you did not tell him where it came from?’

‘He didn’t ask. Indeed, Aunt Jane, I always did show him what I took, and he would have let me in now, only he was not at the office; and the man at the gate, Big Blake, was as savage as a bear, and slammed the door on me, and said they wouldn’t have no idle boys loafing about there. And when I said I wasn’t an idle boy but a scientific mineralogist, and that Mr.

Alexis White always let me in, he laughed in my face, and said Mr. Alexis had better look out for himself. I shall tell Stebbing how cheeky he was.'

'My dear Fergus, there was good reason for keeping you out. You did not know it, nor Alexis; but those stones were put to show that the cliff was getting dangerous, and to mark where to put an iron fence; and it was the greatest of mercies that Rotherwood's life was saved.'

The boy looked a little sobered, but his aunt had rather that his next question had not been: 'Do you think they will let me go there again?'

However, she knew very well that conviction must slowly soak in, and that nothing would be gained by frightening him, so that all she did that night was to send a note by Mysie to her cousin, explaining her discovery; and she made up her mind to take Fergus to the inquest the next day, since his evidence would exonerate Alexis from the most culpable form of carelessness.

Only, however, in the morning, when she had ascertained the hour of the inquest, did she write a note to Mrs. Edgar to explain Fergus's absence from school, or inform the boy of what she intended. On the whole he was rather elated at being so important as to be able to defend Alexis White, and he was quite above believing that scientific research could be reckoned by any one as mischief.

Just as Miss Mohun had gone up to get ready,

Mysie ran in to say that Cousin Rotherwood would be at the door in a moment to take Fergus down.

‘Lady Rotherwood can’t bear his going,’ said Mysie, ‘and Mr. White and Mr. Stebbing say that he need not; but he is quite determined, though he has got his arm in a sling, for he says it was all his fault for going where he ought not. And he won’t have the carriage, for he says it would shake his bones ever so much more than Shank’s mare.’

‘Just like him,’ said Aunt Jane. ‘Has Dr. Dagger given him leave?’

‘Yes; he said it wouldn’t hurt him; but Lady Rotherwood told Miss Elbury she was sure he persuaded him.’

Mysie’s confused pronouns were cut short by Lord Rotherwood’s own appearance.

‘You need not go, Jane,’ he said. ‘I can take care of this little chap. They’ll not chop off his head in the presence of one of the Legislature.’

‘Nice care to begin by chaffing him out of his wits,’ she retorted. ‘The question is, whether you ought to go.’

‘Yes, Jenny, I must go. It can’t damage me; and besides, to tell the truth, it strikes me that things will go hard with that unlucky young fellow if some one is not there to stand up for him and elicit Fergus’s evidence.’

‘Alexis White!’

‘White—ay, a cousin or something of the exemplary

boss. He's been dining with his partners—the old White, I mean—and they've been cramming him—I imagine with a view to scapegoat treatment—jealousy, and all the rest of it. If there is not a dismissal, there's a hovering on the verge.'

'Exactly what I was afraid of,' said Jane. 'Oh, Rotherwood, I could tell you volumes. But may I not come down with you? Could not I do something?'

'Well, on the whole, you are better away, Jenny. Consider William's feelings. Womankind, even Brownies, are better out of it. Prejudice against *protégés*, whether of petticoats or cassocks—begging your pardon. I can fight battles better as an unsophisticated stranger coming down fresh, though I don't expect any one from the barony of Beechcroft to believe it, and maybe the less I know of your volumes the better till after——'

'Oh, Rotherwood, as if I wasn't too thankful to have you to send for me!'

'There! I've kept the firm out there waiting an unconscionable time. They'll think you are poisoning my mind. Come along, you imp of science. Trust me, I'll not bully him, though it's highly tempting to make the *chien chasser de race*.'

'Oh, Aunt Jane, won't you go?' exclaimed Gillian in despair, as her cousin waved a farewell at the gate.

'No, my dear; it is not for want of wishing, but he is quite right. He can do much better than I could.'

'But is he in earnest, aunt?'

‘Oh yes, most entirely, and I quite see that he is right—indeed I do, Gillian. People pretend to defer to a lady, but they really don’t like her poking her nose in, and, after all, I could have no right to say anything. My only excuse for going was to take care of Fergus.’

A further token of Lord Rotherwood’s earnestness in the cause was the arrival of his servant, who was to bring down the large stone which Master Merrifield had moved, and who conveyed it in a cab, being much too grand to carry it through the streets.

Gillian was very unhappy and restless, unable to settle to anything, and linking cause and effect together disconsolately in a manner Mysie, whom she admitted to her confidence, failed to understand.

‘It was a great pity Fergus did not show Alexis where the stone came from, but I don’t see what your not giving him his lessons had to do with it. Made him unhappy? Oh! Gilly dear, you don’t mean any one would be too unhappy to mind his business for such nonsense as that! I am sure none of us would be so stupid if Mr. Pollock forgot our Greek lessons.’

‘Certainly not,’ said Gillian, almost laughing; ‘but you don’t understand, Mysie. It was the taking him up and letting him down, and I could not explain it, and it looked so nasty and capricious.’

‘Well, I suppose you ought to have asked Aunt Jane’s leave; but I *do* think he must be a ridiculous young man if he could not attend to his proper work

because you did not go after him when you were only just come home.'

'Ah, Mysie, you don't understand!'

Mysie opened a round pair of brown eyes, and said, 'Oh! I did think people were never so silly out of poetry. There was Wilfrid in *Rokeby*, to be sure. He was stupid enough about Matilda; but do you mean that he is like that?'

'Don't, don't, you dreadful child; I wish I had never spoken to you,' cried Gillian, overwhelmed with confusion. 'You must never say a word to any living creature.'

'I am sure I shan't,' said Mysie composedly; 'for, as far as I can see, it is all stuff. This Alexis never found out what Fergus was about with the stone, and so the mark was gone, and Cousin Rotherwood trod on it, and the poor little boy was killed; but as to the rest, Nurse Halfpenny would say it was all conceited maggots; and how you can make so much more fuss about that than about the poor child being crushed, I can't make out.'

'But if I think it all my fault?'

'That's maggots,' returned Mysie with uncompromising common-sense. 'You aren't old enough, nor pretty enough, for any of that kind of stuff, Gill!'

And Gillian found that either she must go without comprehension, or have a great deal more implied, if she turned for sympathy to any one save Aunt Jane, who seemed to know exactly how the land lay.

CHAPTER XVI

VANISHED

It seemed to be a very long time before the inquest was over, and Aunt Jane had almost yielded to her niece's impatience and her own, and consented to walk down to meet the intelligence, when Fergus came tearing in, 'I've seen the rock, and there is a flaw of crystallisation in it! And the coroner-man called me an incipient geologist.'

'But the verdict?'

'They said it was accidental death, and something about more care being taken and valuable lives endangered.'

'And Alexis White——'

'Oh! there was a great bother about his not being there. They said it looked very bad; but they could not find him.'

'Not find him! Oh! Where is Cousin Rotherwood?'

'He is coming home, and he said I might run on, and tell you that if you had time to come in to the hotel he would tell you about it.'

With which invitation Miss Mohun hastened to comply ; Gillian was ardent to come too, and it seemed cruel to prevent her ; but, besides that Jane thought that her cousin might be tired enough to make his wife wish him to see as few people as possible, she was not sure that Gillian might not show suspicious agitation, and speech and action would not be free in her presence. So the poor girl was left to extract what she could from her little brother, which did not amount to much.

It was a propitious moment, for Jane met Lord Rotherwood at the door of the hotel, parting with Mr. White ; she entered with him, and his wife, after satisfying herself that he was not the worse for his exertions, was not sorry that he should have his cousin to keep him quiet in his easy-chair while she went off to answer a pile of letters which had just been forwarded from home.

‘ Well, Jenny,’ he said, ‘ I am afraid your *protégé* does not come out of it very well ; that is, if he is your *protégé*. He must be an uncommonly foolish young man.’

‘ I reserve myself on that point. But is it true that he never appeared ?’

‘ Quite true.’

‘ Didn’t they send for him ?’

‘ Yes ; but he could not be found, either at the works or at home. However, the first might be so far accounted for, since he met at his desk a notice of dismissal from White and Stebbing.’

‘No! Really. Concocted at that unlucky dinner yesterday! But, of course, it was not immediate.’

‘Of course not, and perhaps something might have been done for him; but a man who disappears condemns himself.’

‘But what for? I hope Fergus explained that the stone was not near the spot when he showed it.’

‘Yes; Fergus spoke up like a little man, and got more credit than he deserved. If they had known that of all varieties of boys the scientific is the worst imp of mischief! It all went in order due—surgeon explained injuries to poor little being—men how the stone came down and they dug him out—poor little baby-sister made out her sad little story. That was the worst part of all. Something must be done for that child— orphanage or something—only unluckily there’s the father and mother. Poor father! he is the one to be pitied. I mean to get at him without the woman. Well, then came my turn, and how I am afflicted with the habit of going where I ought not, and, only by a wonderful mercy, was saved from being part of the general average below. Then we got to the inquiry, Were not dangerous places railed off? Yes, Stebbing explained that it was the rule of the firm to have the rocks regularly inspected once a month, and once a fortnight in winter and spring, when the danger is greater. If they were ticklish, the place was marked at the moment with big stones, reported, and railed off. An old foreman-sort of fellow swore

to having detected the danger, and put stones. He had reported it. To whom? To Mr. Frank. Yes, he thought it was Mr. Frank, just before he went away. It was this fellow's business to report it and send the order, it seems, and in his absence Alexander White, or whatever they call him, took his work. Well, the old man doesn't seem to know whether he mentioned the thing to young White or not, which made his absence more unlucky; but, any way, the presence of the stones was supposed to be a sufficient indication of the need of the rail, or to any passenger to avoid the place. In fact, if Master White had been energetic, he would have seen to the thing. I fancy that is the long and short of it. But when the question came how the stones came to be removed, I put Fergus forward. The foreman luckily could identify his stone by the precious crack of spar; and the boy explained how he had lugged it down, and showed it to his friend far away from its place—had, in fact, turned over and displaced all the lot.'

'Depend upon it, Alexis has gone out of the way to avoid accusing Fergus!'

'Don't make me start, it hurts; but do you really believe that, Jane—you, the common-sense female of the family?'

'Indeed I do; he is a romantic, sensitive sort of fellow, who would not defend himself at the boy's expense.'

'Wheu! He might have stood still and let

Fergus defend him, then, instead of giving up his own cause.'

'And how did it end?'

'Accidental death, of course; couldn't be otherwise; but censure on the delay and neglect of precaution, which the common opinion of the Court naturally concentrated on the absent; though, no doubt, the first omission was young Stebbing's; but owing to the hurry of his start for Italy, that was easily excused. And even granting that Fergus did the last bit of mischief, your friend may be romantically generous, if you please; but he must have been very slack in his work.'

'Poor fellow—yes. Now before I tell you what I know about him, I should like to hear how Mr. Stebbing represents him. You know his father was a lieutenant in the Royal Wardours.'

'Risen from the ranks, a runaway cousin of White's. Yes, and there's a son in a lawyer's office always writing to White for money.'

'Oh! I never had much notion of that eldest——'

'They have no particular claim on White; but when the father died he wrote to Stebbing to give those that were old enough occupation at the works, and see that the young ones got educated.'

'So he lets the little boys go to the National School, though there's no great harm in that as yet.'

'He meant to come and see after them himself, and find out what they are made of. But meantime this youth, who did well at first, is always running after

music and nonsense of all kinds, thinking himself above his business, neglecting right and left ; while as to the sister, she is said to be very clever at designing—both ways in fact—so determined to draw young Stebbing in, that, having got proof of it at last, they have dismissed her too. And, Jane, I hardly like to tell you, but somehow they mix Gillian up in the business. They ate it up again when I cut them short by saying she was my cousin, her mother and you like my sisters. I am certain it is all nonsense, but had you any notion of any such thing ? It is insulting you, though, to suppose you had not,' he added, as he saw her air of acquiescence ; ' so, of course, it is all right.'

' It is not all right, but not so wrong as all that. Oh no ! and I know all about it from poor Gill herself and the girl. Happily they are both too good girls to need prying. Well, the case is this. There was a quarrel about a love story between the two original Whites, who must both have had a good deal of stuff in them. Dick ran away, enlisted, rose, and was respected by Jasper, etc., but was married to a Greco-Hibernian wife, traditionally very beautiful, poor woman, though rather the reverse at present. Lily and her girls did their best for the young people with good effect on the eldest girl, who really in looks and ways is worthy of her Muse's name, Kalliope. Father had to retire with rank of captain, and died shortly after. Letters failed to reach the Merrifields, who were on

the move. This Quarry cousin was written to, and gave the help he described to you. Perhaps it was just, but it disappointed them, and while the father lived, Alexis had been encouraged to look to getting to the University and Holy Orders. He has a good voice, and the young curate at the Kennel patronised him; perhaps a little capriciously, but I am not quite sure. All this was unknown to me till the Merrifield children came, and Gillian, discovering these Whites, flew upon them in the true enthusiastic Lily-fashion, added to the independence of the modern maiden mistrustful of old cats of aunts. Like a little goose, she held trystes with Kalliope, through the rails at the top of the garden on Sunday afternoons.'

'Only Kalliope!'

'*Celà va sans dire.* The brother was walking the young ones on the cliffs whence she had been driven by the attentions of Master Frank Stebbing. Poor thing, she is really beautiful enough to be a misfortune to her, and so is the youth—Maid of Athens, Irish eyes, *plus* intellect. Gill lent books, and by and by volunteered to help the lad with his Greek.'

'When——'

'Just as she would teach a night-school class. She used to give him lessons at his sister's office. I find that as soon as Kalliope found it was unknown to me she protested, and did all in her power to prevent it, but Gillian had written all to her mother, and thought that sufficient.'

‘And Lily——? Victoria would have gone crazy—supposing such a thing possible,’ he added, *sotto voce*.

‘Lily was probably crazy already between her sick husband and her bridal daughters, for she answered nothing intelligible. However, absence gave time for reflection, and Gillian came home after her visits convinced by her own good sense and principle that she had not acted fairly towards us; so that, of her own accord, the first thing she did was to tell me the whole, and how much the sister had always objected. She was quite willing that I should talk it over with Kalliope before she went near them again, but I have never been able really to do so.’

‘Then it was all Greek and—“Lilyism!” Lily’s grammar over again, eh?’

‘On her side, purely so—but I am afraid she did upset the boy’s mind. He seems to have been bitterly disappointed at what must have appeared like neglect and offence—and oh! you know how silly youths can be—and he had Southern blood too, poor fellow, and he went mooning and moping about, I am afraid really not attending to his business; and instead of taking advantage of the opening young Stebbing’s absence gave him of showing his abilities, absolutely gave them the advantage against him, by letting them show him up as an idle fellow.’

‘Or worse. Stebbing talked of examining the accounts, to see if there were any deficiency.’

‘That can be only for the sake of prejudicing Mr. White—they cannot really suspect him.’

‘If not, it was very good acting, and Stebbing appears to me just the man to suspect a parson’s pet, and a lady’s—as he called this unlucky fellow.’

‘Ask any of the workmen—ask Mr. Flight.’

‘Well, I wish he had come to the front. It looks bad for him, and your plea, Jenny, is more like Lily than yourself.’

‘Thank you; I had rather be like Lily than myself.’

‘And you are equally sure that the sister is maligned?’

‘Quite sure—on good evidence—the thing is how to lay it all before Mr. White, for you see these Stebbings evidently want to prevent him from taking to his own kindred—you must help me, Rotherwood.’

‘When I am convinced,’ he said. ‘My dear Jenny, I beg your pardon—I have an infinite respect for your sagacity, but allow me to observe, though your theory holds together, still it has rather an ancient and fish-like smell.’

‘I only ask you to investigate, and make him do so. Listen to any one who knows, to any one but the Stebbings, and you will find what an admirable girl the sister is, and that the poor boy is perfectly blameless of anything but being forced into a position for which he was never intended, and of all his instincts rebelling.’

They were interrupted by the arrival of the doctor, whom Lady Rotherwood had bound over to come and see whether her husband was the worse for his exertions. He came in apologising most unnecessarily for his tardiness. And in the midst of Miss Mohun's mingled greeting and farewell, she stood still to hear him say that he had been delayed by being called in to that poor woman, Mrs. White, who had had a fit on hearing the policeman inquiring for that young scamp, her son.

'The policeman!' ejaculated Jane in consternation.

'It was only to summon him to attend the inquest,' explained Dr. Dagger; 'but there was no one in the house with her but a little maid, and the shock was dreadful. If he has really absconded, it looks exceedingly ill for him.'

'I believe he has only been inattentive,' said Jane firmly, knowing that she ought to go, and yet feeling constrained to wait long enough to ask what was the state of the poor mother, and if her daughter were with her.

'The daughter was sent for, and seems to be an effective person—uncommonly handsome, by the bye. The attack was hysteria, but there is evidently serious disease about her, which may be accelerated.'

'I thought so. I am afraid she has had no advice.'

'No; I promised the daughter to come and examine her to-morrow when she is calmer, and if that son is good for anything, he may have returned.'

And therewith Jane was forced to go away, to carry this wretched news to poor Gillian.

Aunt and niece went as soon as the mid-day meal was over to inquire for poor Mrs. White, and see what could be done. She was sleeping under an opiate, and Kalliope came down, pale as marble, but tearless. She knew nothing of her brother since she had given him his breakfast that morning. He had looked white and haggard, and had not slept, neither did he eat. She caught at the theory that had occurred to Miss Mohun, that he did not like to accuse Fergus, for even to her he had not mentioned who had removed the stone. In that case he might return at night. Yet it was possible that he did not know even now whence the stone had come, and it was certain that he had been at his office that morning, and opened the letter announcing his dismissal. Kalliope, going later, had found the like notice, but had had little time to dwell on it before she had been summoned home to her mother. Poor Mrs. White had been much shaken by the first reports of yesterday's accident, which had been so told to her as to alarm her for both her children; and when her little maid rushed in to say that 'the pelis was come after Mr. Alec,' it was no wonder that her terror threw her into a most alarming state, which made good Mrs. Lee despatch her husband to bring home Kalliope; and as the attack would not yield to the soothing of the women or to their domestic remedies, but became more and more delirious and

convulsive, the nearest doctor was sent for, and Dr. Dagger, otherwise a higher flight than would have been attempted, was caught on his way and brought in to discover how serious her condition already was.

This Kalliope told them with the desperate quietness of one who could not afford to give way. Her own affairs were entirely swallowed up in this far greater trouble, and for the present there were no means of helping her. Mr. and Mrs. Lee were thoroughly kind, and ready to give her efficient aid in her home cares and her nursing; and it could only be hoped that Alexis might come back in the evening, and set the poor patient's mind at rest.

‘We will try to make Mr. White come to a better understanding,’ said Miss Mohun kindly.

‘Thank you,’ said Kalliope, pushing back her hair with a half-bewildered look. ‘I remember my poor mother was very anxious about that. But it seems a little thing now.’

‘May God bless and help you, my dear,’ said Miss Mohun, with a parting kiss.

Gillian had not spoken all the time; but outside she said—

‘Oh, Aunt! is this my doing?’

‘Not quite,’ said Aunt Jane kindly. ‘There were other causes.’

‘Oh, if I could do anything!’

‘Alas! it is easier to do than to undo.’

Aunt Jane was really kind, and Gillian was grateful ; but oh, how she longed for her mother !

There was no better news the next morning. Nothing had been heard of Alexis, and nothing would persuade his mother in her half-delirious and wholly unreasonable state that he had not been sent to prison, and that they were not keeping it from her. She was exceedingly ill, and Kalliope had been up all night with her.

Such was the report in a note sent up by Mrs. Lee by one of the little boys early in the morning, and, as soon as she could reasonably do so, Miss Mohun carried the report to Lord Rotherwood, whom she found much better, and anxious to renew the tour of inspection which had been interrupted.

Before long, Mr. White was shown in, intending to resume the business discussion, and Miss Mohun was about to retreat with Lady Rotherwood, when her cousin, taking pity on her anxiety, said—

‘If you will excuse me for speaking about your family matters, Mr. White, my cousin knows these young people well, and I should like you to hear what she has been telling me.’

‘A gentleman has just been calling on me about them,’ said Mr. White, not over-graciously.

‘Mr. Flight ?’ asked Jane anxiously.

‘Yes ; a young clergyman, just what we used to call Puseyite when I left England ; but that name seems to be gone out now.’

‘Any way,’ said Jane, ‘I am sure he had nothing but good to say of Miss White, or indeed of her brother ; and I am afraid the poor mother is very ill.’

‘That’s true, Miss Mohun ; but you see there may be one side to a lady or a parson, and another to a practical man like my partner. Not but that I should be willing enough to do anything in reason for poor Dick’s widow and children, but not to keep them in idleness, or letting them think themselves too good to work.’

‘That I am sure these two do not. Their earnings quite keep the family. I know no one who works harder than Miss White, between her business, her lodgers, the children, and her helpless mother.’

‘I saw her mosaics—very fair, very clever, some of them ; but I’m afraid she is a sad little flirt, Miss Mohun.’

‘Mr. White,’ said Lord Rotherwood, ‘did ever you hear of a poor girl beset by an importunate youth, but his family thought it was all her fault?’

‘If Mr. White would see her,’ said Jane, ‘he would understand at a glance that the attraction is perfectly involuntary ; and I know from other sources how persistently she has avoided young Stebbing ; giving up Sunday walks to prevent meeting him, accepting nothing from him, always avoiding *tête-à-têtes*.’

‘Hum ! But tell me this, madam,’ said Mr. White eagerly, ‘how is it that, if these young folks are so steady and diligent as you would make out, that

eldest brother writes to me every few months for help to support them ?’

‘Oh !’ Jane breathed out ; then, rallying, ‘I know nothing about that eldest. Yes, I do though ! His sister told my niece that all the rents of the three houses went to enable Richard to appear as he ought at the solicitor’s office at Leeds.’

‘There’s a screw loose somewhere plainly,’ said Lord Rotherwood.

‘The question is, where it is,’ said Mr. White.

‘And all I hope,’ said Jane, ‘is that Mr. White will judge for himself when he has seen Kalliope and made inquiries all round. I do not say anything for the mother, poor thing, except that she is exceedingly ill just now, but I do thoroughly believe in the daughter.’

‘And this runaway scamp, Miss Mohun ?’

‘I am afraid he is a runaway ; but I am quite sure he is no scamp,’ said Jane.

‘Only so clever as to be foolish, eh ?’ said the Marquis, rather provokingly.

‘Exactly so,’ she answered ; ‘and I am certain that if Mr. White will trust to his own eyes and his own inquiries, he will find that I am right.’

She knew she ought to go, and Lord Rotherwood told her afterwards, ‘That was not an ill-aimed shaft, Jane. Stebbing got more than one snub over the survey. I see that White is getting the notion that there’s a system of hoodwinking going on, and of

not letting him alone, and he is not the man to stand that.'

'If he only would call on Kalliope!'

'I suspect he is afraid of being beguiled by such a fascinating young woman.'

It was a grievous feature in the case to Gillian that she could really do nothing. Mrs. White was so ill that going to see Kalliope was of no use, and Maura was of an age to be made useful at home; and there were features in the affair that rendered it inexpedient for Gillian to speak of it except in the strictest confidence to Aunt Jane or Mysie. It was as if she had touched a great engine, and it was grinding and clashing away above her while she could do nothing to stay its course.

CHAPTER XVII

‘THEY COME, THEY COME’

DR. DAGGER examined Mrs. White and pronounced that there had been mortal disease of long standing, and that she had nearly, if not quite, reached the last stage. While people had thought her selfish, weak, and exacting, she must really have concealed severe suffering, foolishly perhaps, but with great fortitude.

And from hearing this sentence, Kalliope had turned to find at last tidings of her brother in a letter written from Avonchester, the nearest garrison town. He told his sister that, heart-broken already at the result of what he knew to be his own presumption, and horrified at the fatal consequences of his unhappy neglect, he felt incapable of facing any of those whom he had once called his friends, and the letter of dismissal had removed all scruples. Had it not been for his faith and fear, he would have put an end to his life, but she need have no alarms on that score. He had rushed away, scarce knowing what he was doing, till he had found himself on the road to Avonchester, and then had walked on thither and enlisted in the regiment

quartered there, where he hoped to do his duty, having no other hope left in life!

Part of this letter Kalliope read to Miss Mohun, who had come down to hear the doctor's verdict. It was no time to smile at the heart being broken by the return of a valentine, or all hope in life being over before twenty. Kalliope, who knew what the life of a private was, felt wretched over it, and her poor mother was in despair; but Miss Mohun tried to persuade her that it was by no means an unfortunate thing, since Alexis would be thus detained safely and within reach till Sir Jasper arrived to take up the matter, and Mr. White had been able to understand it.

'Yes; but he cannot come to my poor mother. And Richard will be so angry—think it such a degradation.'

'He ought not. Your father——'

'Oh! but he will. And I must write to him. Mother has been asking for him.'

'Tell me, my dear, has Richard ever helped you?'

'Oh no, poor fellow, he could not. He wants all we can send him, or we would have put the little boys to a better school.'

'I would not write before it is absolutely necessary,' said Miss Mohun. 'A young man hanging about with nothing to do, even under these circumstances, might make things harder.'

'Yes, I know,' said Kalliope, with a trembling lip. 'And if it was urgent, even Alexis might come. Indeed,

I ought to be thankful that he is safe, after all my dreadful fears, and not far off.'

Miss Mohun refrained from grieving the poor girl by blaming Alexis for the impetuous selfish folly that had so greatly added to the general distress of his family, and rendered it so much more difficult to plead his cause. In fact, she felt bound to stand up as his champion against all his enemies, though he was less easy of defence than his sister; and Mr. Flight, the first person she met afterwards, was excessively angry and disappointed, speaking of such a step as utter ruin.

'The lad was capable of so much better things,' said he. 'I had hoped so much of him, and had so many plans for him, that it is a grievous pity; but he had no patience, and now he has thrown himself away. I told him it was his first duty to maintain his mother, and if he had stuck to that, I would have done more for him as soon as he was old enough, and I could see what was to be done for the rest of them; but he grew unsettled and impatient, and this is the end of it!'

'Not the end, I hope,' said Miss Mohun. 'It is not exactly slavery without redemption.'

'He does not deserve it.'

'Who does? Besides, remember what his father was.'

'His father must have been of the high-spirited, dare-devil sort. This lad was made for a scholar—

for the priesthood, in fact, and the army will be more uncongenial than these marble works! Foolish fellow, he will soon have had enough of it, with his refinement, among such associates.'

Jane wondered that the young clergyman did not regret that he had sufficiently tried the youth's patience to give the sense of neglect and oblivion. There had been many factors in the catastrophe, and this had certainly been one, since the loan of a few books, and an hour a week of direction of study, would have kept Alexis contented, and have obviated all the perilous intercourse with Gillian; but she scarcely did the Rev. Augustine Flight injustice in thinking that in the æsthetic and the emotional side of religion he somewhat lost sight of the daily drudgery that works on character chiefly as a preventive. 'He was at the bottom of it, little as he knows it,' she said to herself as she walked up the hill. 'How much harm is done by good beginnings of a skein left to tangle.'

Lady Flight provided a trained nurse to help Kalliope, and sent hosts of delicacies; and plenty of abuse was bestowed on Mr. James White for his neglect. Meanwhile Mrs. White, though manifestly in a hopeless state, seemed likely to linger on for some weeks longer.

In the meantime, Miss Mohun at last found an available house, and was gratified by the young people's murmur that 'Il Lido' was too far off from Beechcroft. But then their mother would be glad to be so near St.

Andrew's, for she belonged to the generation that loved and valued daily services.

Lord Rotherwood, perhaps owing to his exertions, felt the accident more than he had done at first, and had to be kept very quiet, which he averred to be best accomplished by having the children in to play with him; and as he always insisted on sending for Valetta to make up the party, the edict of separation fell to the ground, when Lady Rotherwood, having written his letters for him, went out for a drive, taking sometimes Miss Elbury, but more often Adeline Mohun, who flattered herself that her representations had done much to subdue prejudice and smooth matters.

‘Which always were smooth,’ said Jane; ‘smooth and polished as a mahogany table, and as easy to get into.’

However, she was quite content that Ada should be the preferred one, and perhaps no one less acute than herself would have felt that the treatment as intimates and as part of the family was part of the duty of a model wife. Both sisters were in request to enliven the captive, and Jane forebore to worry him with her own anxieties about the present disgrace of the Whites. Nothing could be done for Kalliope in her mother's present state, Alexis must drink of his own brewst, and Sir Jasper and Lady Merrifield were past Brindisi! As to Mr. White, he seemed to be immersed in business, and made no sign of relenting; Jane had made one or two attempts to see him, but had not succeeded.

Only one of her G.F.S. maidens, who was an enthusiastic admirer of Kalliope, and in perfect despair at her absence, mentioned that Mr. White had looked over all their work and had been immensely struck with Miss White's designs, and especially with the table inlaid with autumn leaves, which had been set aside as expensive, unprofitable, and not according to the public taste, and not shown to him on his first visit to the works with Mr. Stebbing. There were rumours in the air that he was not contented with the state of things, and might remain for some time to set them on a different footing.

Miss Adeline had been driving with Lady Rotherwood, and on coming in with her for the afternoon cup of tea, found Mr. White conversing with Lord Rotherwood, evidently just finishing the subject—a reading-room or institute of some sort for the men at the works.

'All these things are since my time,' said Mr White. 'We were left pretty much to ourselves in those days.'

'And what do you think? Should you have been much the better for them?' asked the Marquis.

'Some of us would,' was the answer.

'You would not have thought them a bore?'

'There were some who would, as plenty will now; but we were a rough set—we had not so much to start with as the lads, willy nilly, have now. But I should have been glad of books, and diversion free from law-

lessness might have prevented poor Dick's scrapes. By the bye, that daughter of his can do good work.'

'Poor thing,' said Miss Adeline, 'she is a very good girl, and in great trouble. I was much pleased with her, and I think she has behaved remarkably well under very trying circumstances.'

'I observed that the young women in the mosaic department seemed to be much attached to her,' said Mr. White.

'My sister thinks she has been an excellent influence there.'

'She was not there,' said Mr. White.

'No; her mother is too ill to be left—dying, I should think, from what I hear.'

'From the shock of that foolish lad's evasion?' asked Lord Rotherwood.

'She was very ill before, I believe, though that brought it to a crisis. No one would believe how much that poor girl has had depending on her. I wish she had been at the works—I am sure you would have been struck with her.'

'Have you any reason to think they are in any distress, Miss Mohun?'

'Not actually at present; but I do not know what they are to do in future, with the loss of the salaries those two have had,' said Adeline, exceedingly anxious to say neither too much nor too little.

'There is the elder brother.'

'Oh! he is no help, only an expense.'

'Miss Mohun, may I ask, are you sure of that?'

'As sure as I can be of anything. I have always heard that the rents of their two or three small houses went to support Richard, and that they entirely live on the earnings of the brother and sister, except that you are so good as to educate the younger girl. It has come out casually—they never ask for anything.'

Mr. White looked very thoughtful. Adeline considered whether importunity would do most harm or good; but thought her words might work. When she rose to take leave, Mr. White did the same, 'evidently,' thought she, 'for the sake of escorting her home,' and she might perhaps say another word in confidence for the poor young people. She had much reliance, and not unjustly, on her powers of persuasion, and she would make the most of those few steps to her own door.

'Indeed, Mr. White,' she began, 'excuse me, but I cannot help being very much interested in those young people we were speaking of.'

'That is your goodness, Miss Mohun. I have no doubt they are attractive—there's no end to the attractiveness of those Southern folk they belong to—on one side of the house at least; but unfortunately you never know where to have them—there's no truth in them; and though I don't want to speak of anything I may have done for them, I can't get over their professing never to have had anything from me.'

‘May I ask whether you sent it through that eldest brother?’

‘Certainly; he always wrote to me.’

‘Then, Mr. White, I cannot help believing that the family here never heard of it. Do you know anything of that young man?’

‘No; I will write to his firm and inquire. Thank you for the hint, Miss Mohun.’

They were at Beehcroft Cottage gate, and he seemed about to see her even to the door. At that instant a little girlish figure advanced and was about to draw back on perceiving that Miss Adeline was not alone, when she exclaimed, ‘Maura, is it you, out so late! How is your mother?’

‘Much the same, thank you, Miss Adeline!’

‘Here is one of the very young folks we were mentioning,’ said Ada, seeing her opportunity, and glad that there was light enough to show the lady-like little figure. ‘This is Maura, Mr. White, whom you are kindly educating.’

Mr. White took the hand, which was given with a pretty respectful gesture, and said something kind about her mother’s illness, while Adeline took the girl into the house and asked if she had come on any message.

‘Yes, if you please,’ said Maura, blushing; ‘Miss Mohun was so kind as to offer to lend us an air-cushion, and poor mamma is so restless and uncomfortable that Kally thought it might ease her a little.’

'By all means, my dear. Come in, and I will have it brought,' said Adeline, whose property the cushion was, and who was well pleased that Mr. White came in likewise, and thus had a full view of Maura's great wistful, long-lashed eyes, and delicate refined features, under a little old brown velvet cap, and the slight figure in a gray ulster. He did not speak while Maura answered Miss Adeline's inquiries, but when the cushion had been brought down, and she had taken it under her arm, he exclaimed—

'Is she going back alone?'

'Oh yes,' said Maura cheerfully; 'it is not really dark out of doors yet.'

'I suppose it could not be helped,' said Miss Adeline.

'No; Theodore is at the school. They keep him late to get things ready for the inspection, and Petros had to go to the doctor's to fetch something; but he will meet me if he is not kept waiting.'

'It is not fit for a child like that to go alone so late,' said Mr. White, who perhaps had imbibed Italian notions of the respectability of an escort. 'I will walk down with her.'

Maura looked as if darkness were highly preferable to such a cavalier; but Miss Adeline was charmed to see them walk off together, and when her sister presently came in with Gillian and Fergus, she could not but plume herself a little on her achievement.

'Then it was those two!' exclaimed Jane. 'I

thought so from the other side of the street, but it was too dark to be certain; and besides, there was no believing it.'

'Did not they acknowledge you?'

'Oh no; they were much too busy.'

'Talking. Oh, what fun!' Adeline could not help observing in such glee that she looked more like 'our youngest girl' than the handsome middle-aged aunt.

'But,' suggested Fergus, somewhat astonished, 'Stebbing says he is no end of a horrid brute of a screw.'

'Indeed. What has he been doing?'

'He only tipped him a coach wheel.'

'Well, to tip over as a coach wheel is the last thing I should have expected of Mr. White,' said Aunt Jane, misunderstanding on purpose.

'A crown piece then,' growled Fergus; 'and of course he thought it would be a sovereign, and so he can't pay me my two tan—shillings, I mean, that I lent him, and so I can't get the lovely ammonite I saw at Nott's.'

'How could you be so silly as to lend him any money?'

'I didn't want to; but he said he would treat us all round if I wouldn't be mean, and after all I only got half a goody, with all the liqueur out of it.'

'It served you right,' said Gillian. 'I doubt whether you would see the two shillings again, even if he had the sovereign.'

'He faithfully promised I should,' said Fergus, whose allegiance was only half broken. 'And old White is a beast, and no mistake. He was perfectly savage to Stebbing's major, and he said he wouldn't be under him, at no price.'

'Perhaps Mr. White might say the same,' put in Aunt Ada.

'He is a downright old screw and a bear, I tell you,' persisted Fergus. 'He jawed Frank Stebbing like a pickpocket for just having a cigar in the quarry.'

'Close to the blasting powder, eh?' said Miss Mohun.

'And he is boring and worrying them all out of their lives over the books,' added Fergus. 'Poking his nose into everything, so that Stebbing says his governor vows he can't stand it, and shall cut the concern if the old brute does not take himself off to Italy before long.'

'What a good thing!' thought both sisters, looking into each other's eyes and auguring well for the future.

All were anxious to hear the result of Maura's walk, and Gillian set out in the morning on a voyage of discovery with a glass of jelly for Mrs. White; but all she could learn was that the great man had been very kind to Maura, though he had not come in, at which Gillian was indignant.

'Men are often shy of going near sickness and sorrow,' said her Aunt Ada. 'You did not hear what they talked about?'

‘No; Maura was at school, and Kally is a bad person to pump.’

‘I should like to pump Mr. White,’ was Aunt Jane’s comment.

‘If I could meet him again,’ said Aunt Ada, ‘I feel sure he would tell *me*.’

Her sister laughed a little, so well did she know that little half-conscious, half-gratified tone of assumption of power over the other sex; but Miss Adeline proved to be right. Nay, Mr. White actually called in the raw cold afternoon, which kept her in when every one else was out. He came for the sake of telling her that he was much pleased with the little girl—a pretty creature, and simple and true, he really believed. Quite artlessly, in answer to his inquiries, she had betrayed that her eldest brother never helped them. ‘Oh no! Mamma was always getting all the money she could to send to him, because he must keep up appearances at his office at Leeds, and live like a gentleman, and it did not signify about Kalliope and Alexis doing common work.’

‘That’s one matter cleared up,’ rejoiced Jane. ‘It won’t be brought up against them now.’

‘And then it seems he asked the child about her sister’s lovers.’

‘Oh!’

‘It was for a purpose. Don’t be old maidish, Jenny!’

‘Well, he isn’t a gentleman.’

'Now, Jane, I'm sure——'

'Never mind. I want to hear; only I should have thought you would have been the first to cry out.'

'Little Maura seems to have risen to the occasion, and made a full explanation as far as she knew—and that was more than the child ought to have known, by the bye—of how Mr. Frank was always after Kally, and how she could not bear him, and gave up the Sunday walk to avoid him, and how he had tried to get her to marry him, and go to Italy with him; but she would not hear of it.'

'Just the thing the little chatterbox would be proud of; but it is no harm that "*Mon oncle des îles Philippines*" should know.'

'“I see his little game” was what Mr. White said,’ repeated Adeline. ‘“The young dog expected to come over me with this pretty young wife—my relation, too; but he would have found himself out in his reckoning.”’

'So far so good; but it is not fair.'

'However, the ice is broken. What's that? Is the house coming down?'

No; but Gillian and Valetta came rushing in, almost tumbling over one another, and each waving a sheet of a letter. Papa and mamma would land in three days' time if all went well; but the pity was that they must go to London before coming to Rockquay, since Sir Jasper must present himself to the military and medical authorities, and likewise see his mother, who was in a very failing state.

The children looked and felt as if the meeting were deferred for years ; but Miss Mohun, remembering the condition of 'Il Lido,' alike as to the presence of workmen and absence of servants, felt relieved at the respite, proceeded to send a telegram to Macrae, and became busier than ever before in her life.

The Rotherwoods were just going to London. The Marquis was wanted for a division, and though both he and Dr. Dagger declared his collar-bone quite repaired, his wife could not be satisfied without hearing for herself a verdict to the same effect from the higher authorities, being pretty sure that whatever their report might be, his abstract would be 'All right. Never mind.'

Fly had gained so much in flesh and strength, and was so much more like her real self, that she was to remain at the hotel with Miss Elbury, the rooms being kept for her parents till Easter. Mysie was, however, to go with them to satisfy her mother, 'with a first mouthful of children,' said Lord Rotherwood. 'Gillian had better come too ; and we will write to the Merri-fields to come to us, unless they are bound to the old lady.'

This, however, was unlikely, as she was very infirm, and her small house was pretty well filled by her attendants. Lady Rotherwood seconded the invitation like a good wife, and Gillian was grateful. Such a forestalling was well worth even the being the Marchioness's guest, and being treated with careful

politeness and supervision as a girl of the period, always ready to break out. However, she would have Mysie, and she tried to believe Aunt Jane, who told her that she had conjured up a spectre of the awful dame. There was a melancholy parting on the side of poor little Lady Phyllis. 'What shall I do without you, Mysie dear?'

'It is only for a few days.'

'Yes; but then you will be in a different house, all down in the town—it will be only visiting—not like sisters.'

'Sisters are quite a different thing,' said Mysie stoutly; 'but we can be the next thing to it in our hearts.'

'It is not equal,' said Fly. 'You don't make a sister of me, and I do of you.'

'Because you know no better! Poor Fly, I do wish I could give you a sister of your own.'

'Do you know, Mysie, I think—I'm quite sure, that daddy is going to ask your father and mother to give you to us, out and out.'

'Oh! I'm sure they won't do that,' cried Mysie in consternation. 'Mamma never would!'

'And wouldn't you? Don't you like me as well as Gill and Val?'

'I *like* you better. Stop, don't, Fly; you are what people call more of a companion to me—my friend; but friends aren't the same as sisters, are they? They may be more, or they may be less, but it is not the

same kind. And then it is not only you; there are papa and mamma and all my brothers.'

'But you *do* love daddy, and you have not seen yours for four years, and Aunt Florence and all the cousins at Beechcroft say they were quite afraid of him.'

'Because he is so—— Oh! I don't know how to say it, but he is just like Epaminondas, or King Arthur, or Robert Bruce, or——'

'Well, that's enough,' said Fly; 'I am sure my daddy would laugh if you said he was like all those.'

'To be sure he would!' said Mysie. 'And do you think I would give mine for him, though yours is so kind and good and such fun?'

'And I'm sure I'd rather have him than yours,' said Fly.

'Well, that's right. It would be wicked not to like one's own father and mother best.'

'But if they thought it would be good for you to have all my governesses and advantages, and they took pity on my loneliness. What then?'

'Then? Oh! I'd try to bear it,' said unworldly and uncomplimentary Mysie. 'And you need not be lonely now. There's Val!'

The two governesses had made friends, and the embargo on intercourse with Valetta had been allowed to drop; but Fly only shook her head, and allowed that 'Val was better than nothing.'

Mysie had a certain confidence that mamma would

not give her away if all the lords and ladies in the world wanted her; and Gillian confirmed her in that belief, so that no misgiving interfered with her joy at finding herself in the train, where Lord Rotherwood declared that the two pair of eyes shone enough to light a candle by.

'I feel,' said Mysie, jumping up and down in her seat, 'like the man who said he had a bird in his bosom.'

'Or a bee in his bonnet, eh?' said Lord Rotherwood, while Mysie obeyed a sign from my lady to moderate the restlessness of her ecstasies.

'It really was a bird in his bosom,' said Gillian gravely, 'only he said so when he was dying in battle, and he meant his faith to his king.'

'And little Mysie has kept her faith to her mother,' said their cousin, putting out his hand to turn the happy face towards him. 'So the bird may well sing to her.'

'In spite of parting with Phyllis?' asked Lady Rotherwood.

'I can't help it, *indeed*,' said Mysie, divided between her politeness and her dread of being given away; 'it has been very nice, but one's own, own papa and mamma must be more than any one.'

'So they ought,' said Lord Rotherwood, and there it ended, chatter in the train not being considered desirable.

Gillian longed to show Mysie and Geraldine Grin-

stead to each other, and the first rub with her hostess occurred when the next morning she proposed to take a cab and go to Brompton.

‘Is not your first visit due to your grandmother?’ said Lady Rotherwood. ‘You might walk there, and I will send some one to show you the way.’

‘We must not go there till after luncheon,’ said Gillian. ‘She is not ready to see any one, and Bessie Merrifield cannot be spared; but I know Mrs. Grinstead will like to see us, and I do so want Mysie to see the studio.’

‘My dear’ (it was not a favourable my dear), ‘I had rather you did not visit any one I do not know while you are under my charge.’

‘She is Phyllis’s husband’s sister,’ pleaded Gillian.

Lady Rotherwood made a little bend of acquiescence, but said no more, and departed, while Gillian inly raged. A few months ago she would have acted on her own responsibility (if Mysie would not have been too much shocked), but she had learnt the wisdom of submission in fact, if not in word, for she growled about great ladies and exclusiveness, so that Mysie looked mystified.

It was certainly rather dull in the only half-revivified London house, and Belgrave Square in Lent did not present a lively scene from the windows. The Liddesdales had a house there, but they were not to come up till the season began; and Gillian was turning with a sigh to ask if there might not be some books in Fly’s schoolroom, when Mysie caught the

sound of a bell, and ventured on an expedition to find her ladyship and ask leave to go to church.

There, to their unexpected delight, they beheld not only Bessie, but a clerical-looking back, which, after some watching, they so identified that they looked at one another with responsive eyes, and Gillian doubted whether this were recompense for submission, or reproof for discontent.

Very joyful was the meeting on the steps of St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, and an exchange of 'Oh! how did you come here? Where are you?'

Harry had come up the day before, and was to go and meet the travellers at Southampton with his uncle, Admiral Merrifield, who had brought his eldest daughter Susan to relieve her sister or assist her. Great was the joy and eager the talk, as first Bessie was escorted by the whole party back to grandmamma's house, and then Harry accompanied his sisters to Belgrave Square, where he was kept to luncheon; and Lady Rotherwood was as glad to resign his sisters to his charge as he could be to receive them.

He had numerous commissions to execute for his vicar, and Gillian had to assist the masculine brains in the department of Church needlework, actually venturing to undertake some herself, trusting to the tuition of Aunt Ada, a proficient in the same; while Mysie reverently begged at least to hem the borders.

Then they revelled in the little paradises of books and pictures in Northumberland Avenue and Westminster

Sanctuary, and went to Evensong at the Abbey, Mysie's first sight thereof, and nearly the like to Gillian, since she only remembered before a longing not to waste time in a dull place instead of being in the delightful streets.

'It is a thing never to forget,' she said under her breath, as they lingered in the nave.

'I never guessed anything could make one feel so,' added Mysie, with a little sigh of rapture.

'That strange unexpected sense of delight always seems to me to explain, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive,"' said Harry.

Mysie whispered—

'Beneath thy contemplation

Sink heart and voice oppress!'

'Oh, Harry, can't we stay and see Henry VII.'s Chapel, and Poets' Corner, and Edward I.'s monument?' pleaded the sister.

'I am afraid we must not, Gill. I have to see after some vases, and to get a lot of things at the Stores, and it will soon be dark. If I don't go to Southampton to-morrow, I will take you then. Now then, feet or cab?'

'Oh, let us walk! It is ten times the fun.'

'Then mind you don't jerk me back at the crossings.'

There are few pleasures greater of their kind than that of the youthful country cousin under the safe escort of a brother or father in London streets. The sisters looked in at windows, wondered and enjoyed,

till they had to own their feet worn out, and submit to a four-wheeler.

'An hour of London is more than a month of Rockquay, or a year of Silverfold,' cried Gillian.

'Dear old Silverfold,' said Mysie; 'when shall we go back?'

'By the bye,' said Harry, 'how about the great things that were to be done for mother?'

'Primrose is all right,' said Mysie. 'The dear little thing has written a nice copybook, and hemmed a whole set of handkerchiefs for papa. She is so happy with them.'

'And you, little Mouse?'

'I have done my translation—not quite well, I am afraid, and made the little girl's clothes. I wonder if I may go and take them to her.'

'And Val has finished her crewel cushion, thanks to the aunts,' said Gillian.

'Fergus's machine, how about that? Perpetual motion, wasn't it?'

'That has turned into mineralogy, worse luck,' said Gillian.

'Gill has done a beautiful sketch of Rockquay,' added Mysie.

'Oh! don't talk of me,' said Gillian. 'I have only made a most unmitigated mess of everything.'

But here attention was diverted by Harry's exclaiming—

'Hullo! was that Henderson?'

‘Nonsense; the Wardours are at Cork.’

‘He may be on leave.’

‘Or retired. He is capable of it.’

‘I believe it was old Fangs.’

The discussion lasted to Belgrave Square.

And then Sunday was spent upon memorable churches and services under the charge of Harry, who was making the most of his holiday. The trio went to Evensong at St. Wulstan’s, and a grand idea occurred to Gillian—could not Theodore White become one of those young choristers, who had their home in the Clergy House?

CHAPTER XVIII

FATHER AND MOTHER

THE telegram came early on Monday morning. Admiral Merrifield and Harry started by the earliest train, deciding not to take the girls; whereupon their kind host, to mitigate the suspense, placed himself at the young ladies' disposal for anything in the world that they might wish to see. It was too good an opportunity of seeing the Houses of Parliament to be lost, and the spell of Westminster Abbey was upon Mysie.

Cousin Rotherwood was a perfect escort, and declared that he had not gone through such a course of English history since he had taken his cousin Lilies and his sister Florence the same round more years ago than it was civil to recollect. He gave a sigh to the great men he had then let them see and hear, and regretted the less that there was no possibility of regaling the present pair with a debate. It was all like a dream to the two girls. They saw, but suspense was throbbing in their hearts all the time, and qualms were crossing Gillian as she recollected that in some aspects her father could be rather a terrible personage when

one was wilfully careless, saucy to authorities, or unable to see or confess wrong-doing; and the element of dread began to predominate in her state of expectation. The bird in the bosom fluttered very hard as the possible periods after the arrivals of trains came round; and it was not till nearly eight o'clock that the decisive halt of wheels was heard, and in a few moments Mysie was in the dearest arms in the world, and Gillian feeling the moustached kiss she had not known for nearly four long years, and which was half-strange, half-familiar.

In drawing-room light, there was the mother looking none the worse for her journey, her clear brown skin neither sallow nor lined, and the soft brown eyes as bright and sweet as ever; but the father must be learnt over again, and there was awe enough as well as enthusiastic love to make her quail at the thought of her record of self-will.

There was, however, no disappointment in the sight of the fine, tall soldierly figure, broad shouldered, but without an ounce of superfluous flesh, and only altered by his hair having become thinner and whiter, thus adding to the height of his forehead, and making his very dark eyebrows and eyes have a different effect, especially as he was still pallid beneath the browning of many years, though he declared himself so well as to be ashamed of being invalided.

Time was short. Harry and the Admiral, who were coming to dinner, had rushed home to dress and to fetch Susan; and Lady Merrifield was conducted

in haste to her bedroom, and left to the almost too excited ministrations of her daughters.

It was well that attentive servants had unfastened the straps, for when Gillian had claimed the keys of the dear old familiar box, her hand shook so much that they jingled; the key would not go into the hole, and she had to resign them to sober Mysie, who had been untying the bonnet, with a kiss, and answering for the health of Primrose, whom Uncle William was to bring to London in two days' time.

'My dear silly child,' said her mother, surprised at Gillian's emotion.

And the reply was a burst of tears. 'Oh, so silly! so wrong! I have so wanted you.'

'I know all about it. You told us all, like an honest child.'

'Oh, such dreadful things—the rock—the poor child killed—Cousin Rotherwood hurt.'

'Yes, yes, I heard! We can't have it out now. Here's papa! She is upset about these misadventures,' added Lady Merrifield, looking up to her husband, who stood amazed at the sobs that greeted him.

'You must control yourself, Gillian,' he said gravely. 'Stop that! Your mother is tired, and has to dress! Don't worry her. Go, if you cannot leave off.'

The bracing tone made Gillian swallow her tears, the more easily because of the familiarity of home atmosphere, confidence, and protection; and a mute caress from her mother was a promise of sympathy.

The sense of that presence was the chief pleasure of the short evening, for there were too many claimants for the travellers' attention to enable them to do more than feast their eyes on their son and daughters, while they had to talk of other things, the weddings, the two families, the home news, all deeply interesting in their degree, though not touching Gillian *quite* so deeply as the tangle she had left at Rockstone, and mamma's view of her behaviour; even though it was pleasant to hear of Phyllis's beautiful home in Ceylon, and Alethea's bungalow, and how poor Claude had to go off alone to Rawul Pindee. She felt sure that her mother was far more acceptable to her hostess than either of the aunts, and that, indeed, she might well be so!

Gillian's first feeling was like Mysie's in the morning, that nothing could go wrong with her again; but she must perforce have patience before she could be heard. Harry could not be spared for another day from his curacy, and to him was due the first *tête-à-tête* with his mother, after that most important change his life had yet known, and in which she rejoiced so deeply. 'The dream of her heart,' she said, 'had always been that one of her sons should be dedicated'; and now that the fulfilment had come in her absence, it was precious to her to hear all those feelings and hopes and trials that the young man could have uttered to no other ears.

Sir Jasper, meantime, had gone out on business, and was to meet the rest at luncheon at his mother's house, go with them to call on the Grinsteeds, and

then do some further commissions, Lady Rotherwood placing the carriage at their disposal. As to 'real talk,' that seemed impossible for the girls; they could only, as Mysie expressed it, 'bask in the light of mamma's eyes,' and after Harry was gone on an errand for his vicar, there were no private interviews for her.

Indeed, the mother did not know how much Gillian had on her mind, and thought all she wanted was discussion, and forgiveness for the follies explained in the letter, the last received. Of any connection between that folly and the accident to Lord Rotherwood of course she was not aware, and in fact she had more on her hands than she could well do in the time allotted, and more people to see. Gillian had to find that things could not be quite the same as when she had been chief companion in the seclusion of Silverfold.

And just as she was going out the following letter was put into her hands, come by one of the many posts from Rockstone:—

'MY DEAR GILLIAN—I write to you because you can explain matters, and I want your father's advice, or Cousin Rotherwood's. As I was on the way to Il Lido just now I met Mr. Flight, looking much troubled and distressed. He caught at me, and begged me to go with him to tell poor Kalliope that her brother Alexis is in Avonchester Jail. He knew it from having come down in the train with Mr. Stebbing. The charge is for having carried away with him £15 in

notes, the payment for a marble cross for a grave at Barnscombe. You remember that on the day of the accident poor Field was taking it in the waggon, when he came home to hear of his child's death.

‘The receipt for the price was inquired for yesterday, and it appeared that the notes had been given to Field in an envelope. In his trouble, the poor man forgot to deliver this till the morning; when on his way to the office he met young White and gave it to him. Finding it had not been paid in, nor entered in the books, and knowing the poor boy to have absconded, off went Mr. Stebbing, got a summons, and demanded to have him committed for trial.

‘Alexis owned to having forgotten the letter in the shock of the dismissal, and to having carried it away with him, but said that as soon as he had discovered it he had forwarded it to his sister, and had desired her to send it to the office. He did not send it direct, because he could only, at the moment, get one postage-stamp. On this he was remanded till Saturday, when his sister's evidence can be taken at the magistrates' meeting. This was the news that Mr. Flight and I had to take to that poor girl, who could hardly be spared from her mother to speak to us, and how she is to go to Avonchester it is hard to say; but she has no fear of not being able to clear her brother, for she says she put the dirty and ragged envelope that no doubt contained the notes into another, with a brief explanation, addressed it to Mr. Stebbing, and sent it by Petros, who told her that he had delivered it.

‘I thought nothing could be clearer, and so did Mr. Flight; but unluckily Kalliope had destroyed her brother’s letter, and had not read me this part of it, so that she can bring no actual tangible proof; and it is a much more serious matter than it appeared when we were talking to her. Mr. White has just been here, whether to condole or to triumph I don’t exactly know. He has written to Leeds, and heard a very unsatisfactory account of that eldest brother, who certainly has deceived him shamefully, and this naturally adds to the prejudice against the rest of the family. We argued about Kalliope’s high character, and he waved his hand and said, “My dear ladies, you don’t understand those Southern women—the more pious, devoted doves they are, the blacker they will swear themselves to get off their scamps of men.” To represent that Kalliope is only one quarter Greek was useless, especially as he has been diligently imbued by Mrs. Stebbing with all last autumn’s gossip, and, as he confided to Aunt Ada, thinks “that they take advantage of his kindness!”

‘Of course Mr. Flight, and all who really know Alexis and Kalliope, feel the accusation absurd; but it is only too possible that the Avonchester magistrates may not see the evidence in the same light, as its weight depends upon character, and the money is really missing; so that I much fear their committing him for trial at the Quarter Sessions. It will probably be the best way to employ a solicitor to watch the

case at once, and I shall speak to Mr. Norton to-morrow, unless your father can send me any better advice by post. I hope it is not wicked to believe that the very fact of Mr. Norton's being concerned might lead to the notes finding themselves.

'Meantime, I am of course doing what I can. Kally is very brave in her innocence and her brother's, but, shut up in her mother's sickroom, she little guesses how bad things are made to look, or how Greek and false are treated as synonymous.

'Much love to your mother. I am afraid this is a damper on your happiness, but I am sure that your father would wish to know. Aunt Ada tackles Mr. White better than I do, and means if possible to make him go to Avonchester himself when the case comes on, so that he should at least see and hear for himself.—
Your affectionate aunt, J. M.'

What a letter for poor Gillian! She had to pocket it at first, and only opened it while taking off her hat at grandmamma's house; and there was only time for a blank feeling of uncomprehending consternation before she had to go down to luncheon, and hear her father and uncle go on with talk about India and Stokesley, to which she could not attend.

Afterwards, Lady Merrifield was taken to visit grandmamma, and Bessie gratified the girls with a sight of her special den, where she wrote her stories, showing them the queer and flattering gifts that had

come to her in consequence of her authorship, which was becoming less anonymous, since her family were growing hardened to it, and grandmamma was past hearing of it or being distressed. It was in Bessie's room that Gillian gathered the meaning of her aunt's letter, and was filled with horror and dismay. She broke out with a little scream, which brought both Mysie and Bessie to her side; but what could they do? Mysie was shocked and sympathising enough, and Bessie was trying to understand the complicated story, when the summons came for the sisters. There were hopes of communicating the catastrophe in the carriage; but no, the first exclamation of 'Oh, mamma!' was lost.

Sir Jasper had something so important to tell his wife about his interviews at the Horse Guards, that the attempt to interrupt was silenced by a look and sign. It was a happy thing to have a father at home, but it was different from being mamma's chief companion and confidante, and poor Gillian sat boiling over with something very like indignation at not being allowed even to show that she had something to tell at least as important as anything papa *could* be relating.

She hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry that the Grinsteeds proved to be out of town; but at any rate she might be grateful to Lady Rotherwood for preventing a vain expedition—a call on another old friend, Mrs. Craydon, the Marianne Weston of early youth, and now a widow, as she too was out. Then

followed some shopping that the parents wanted to do together, but at the door of the Stores Lady Merrifield said—

‘I have a host of things to get here for the two brides. Suppose, papa, that you walk home with Gillian across the Park. It will suit you better than this fearful list.’

Lady Merrifield only thought of letting father and daughter renew their acquaintance, and though she saw that Gillian was in an agony to speak about something, did not guess what an ordeal the girl felt it to have to begin with the father, unseen for four years, and whose searching eyes and grave politeness gave a sense of austerity, so that trepidation was spoiling all the elation at having a father, and such a father, to walk with.

‘Well, Gillian,’ he said, ‘we have a great deal of lee way to make up. I want to hear of poor White’s children. I am glad you have had the opportunity of showing them some kindness.’

‘Oh, papa ! it is so dreadful ! If you would read this letter.’

‘I cannot do so here,’ said Sir Jasper, who could not well make trial of his new spectacles in Great George Street. ‘What is dreadful ?’

‘This accusation. Poor Alexis ! Oh ! you don’t know. The accident and all—our fault—mine really,’ gasped Gillian.

‘I am not likely to know at this rate,’ said Sir

Jasper. 'I hope you have not caught the infection of incoherency from Lord Rotherwood. Do you mean his accident?'

'Yes; they have turned them both off, and now they have gone and put Alexis in prison.'

'For the accident? I thought it was a fall of rock.'

'Oh no—I mean yes—it wasn't for that; but it came of that, and Fergus and I were at the bottom of it,' said Gillian, in such confusion that her words seemed to tumble out without her own control.

'How did you escape with your lives?'

Was he misunderstanding her on purpose, or giving a lesson on slipslop at such a provoking moment? Perhaps he was really only patient with the daughter who must have seemed to him half-foolish, but she was forced to collect her senses and say—

'I only meant that we were the real cause. Fergus is wild about geology, and took away a stone that was put to show where the cliff was unsafe. He showed the stone to Alexis White, who did not know where it came from and let him have it, and that was the way Cousin Rotherwood came to tread on the edge of the precipice.'

'What had you to do with it?'

'I—oh! I had disappointed Alexis about the lessons,' said Gillian, blushing a little; 'and he was out of spirits, and did not mind what he was about.'

'H'm! But you cannot mean that this youth can have been imprisoned for such a cause.'

‘No; that was about the money, but of course he sent it back. He ran away when he was dismissed, because he was quite in despair, and did not know what he was about.’

‘I think not, indeed!’

‘Papa,’ said Gillian, steadyng her voice, ‘you must not, please, blame him so much, for it was really very much my fault, and that is what makes me doubly unhappy. Did you read my last letter to mamma?’

‘Yes. I understood that you thought you had not treated your aunts rightly by not consulting them about your intercourse with the Whites, and that you had very properly resolved to tell them all. I hope you did so.’

‘Indeed I did, and Aunt Jane was very kind, or else I should have had no comfort at all. Was mamma very much shocked at my teaching Alexis?’

‘I do not remember. We concluded that whatever you did had your aunts’ sanction.’

‘Ah! that was the point.’

‘Did these young people persuade you to secrecy?’

‘Oh no, no; Kalliope protested, and I overpowered her, because—because I was foolish, and I thought Aunt Jane interfering.’

‘I see,’ said Sir Jasper, with perhaps more comprehension of the antagonism than sisterly habit and affection would have allowed to his wife. ‘I am glad you saw your error, and tried to repair it; but what could you have done to affect this boy so much.

How old is he? We thought of him as twelve or fourteen, but one forgets how time goes on, and you speak of him as in a kind of superintendent's position.'

'He is nineteen.'

Sir Jasper twirled his moustache.

'I begin to perceive,' he said; 'you rushed into an undertaking that became awkward, and when you had to draw off, the young fellow was upset and did not mind his business. So far I understand, but you said something about prison.'

The worst part of the personal confession was over now, and Gillian could go on to tell the rest of the Stebbing enmity, of Mr. White's arrival, and of the desire to keep his relations aloof from him.

'This is guess work,' said Sir Jasper.

'I think Cousin Rotherwood would say the same,' rejoined Gillian, and then she explained the dismissal, the flight, and the unfortunate consequences, and that Aunt Jane hoped for advice by the morning's post.

'I am afraid it is too late for that,' said Sir Jasper, looking at his watch. 'I must read her letter and consider.'

Gillian gave a desperate sigh, and felt more desperate when at that moment the very man they had had a glimpse of on Saturday met them, exclaiming in a highly delighted tone—

'Sir Jasper Merrifield!'

Any Royal Wardour ought to have been welcome

to the Merrifields, but this individual had not been a particular favourite with the young people. They knew he was the son of a popular dentist, who had made his fortune, and had put his son into the army to make a gentleman of him, and prevent him from becoming an artist. In the first object there had been very fair success; but the taste for art was unquenchable, and it had been the fashion of the elder half of the Merrifield family to make a joke, and profess to be extremely bored, when 'Fangs,' as they naughtily called him among themselves, used to arrive from leave, armed with catalogues, or come in with his drawings to find sympathy in his colonel's wife. Gillian had caught enough from her four elders to share in an unreasoning way their prejudice, and she felt doubly savage and contemptuous when she heard—

'Yes, I retired.'

'And what are you doing now?'

'My mother required me as long as she lived' (then Gillian noticed that he was in mourning). 'I think I shall go abroad, and take lessons at Florence or Rome, though it is too late to do anything seriously—and there are affairs to be settled first.'

Then came a whole shoal of other inquiries, and even though they actually included 'poor White' and his family, Gillian was angered and dismayed at the wretch being actually asked by her father to come in with them and see Lady Merrifield, who would be delighted to see him.

‘What would Lady Rotherwood think of the liberty?’ the displeased mood whispered to Gillian.

But Lady Rotherwood, presiding over her pretty Worcester tea-set, was quite ready to welcome any of the Merrifield friends. There were various people in the room besides Lady Merrifield and Mysie, who had just come in. There was the Admiral talking politics with Lord Rotherwood, and there was Clement Underwood, who had come with Harry from the city, and Bessie discussing with them boys’ guilds and their amusements.

Gillian felt frantic. Would no one cast a thought on Alexis in prison? If he had been to be hanged the next day, her secret annoyance at their indifference to his fate could not have been worse.

And yet at the first opportunity Harry brought Mr. Underwood to talk to her about his choir-boys, and to listen to her account of the 7th Standard boy, a member of the most musical choir in Rockquay, and the highest of the high.

‘I hope not cockiest of the cocky,’ said Mr. Underwood, smiling. ‘Our experience is that superlatives may often be so translated.’

‘I don’t think poor Theodore is cocky,’ said Gillian; ‘the Whites have always been so bullied and sat upon.’

‘Is his name Theodore?’ asked Mr. Underwood, as if he liked the name, which Gillian remembered to have seen on a cross at Vale Leston.

‘Being sat upon is hardly the best lesson in humility,’ said Harry.

‘There’s apt to be a reaction,’ said Mr. Underwood ; ‘but the crack voice of a country choir is not often in that condition, as I know too well. I was the veriest young prig myself under those circumstances!’

‘Don’t be too hard on cockiness,’ said Lord Rotherwood, who had come up to them ; ‘there must be consciousness of powers. How are you to fly, if you mustn’t flap your wings and crow a little?’

‘*On a les défauts de ses qualités,*’ put in Lady Merrifield.

‘Yes,’ added Mr. Underwood. ‘It is quite true that needful self-assertion and originality, and sense of the evils around——’

—‘Which the old folk have outgrown and got used to,’ said Lord Rotherwood.

—‘May be condemned as conceit,’ concluded Mr. Underwood.

‘Ay, exactly as Eliab knew David’s pride and the naughtiness of his heart,’ said Lord Rotherwood. ‘If you won’t fight your giant yourself, you’ve no business to condemn those who feel it in them to go at him.’

‘Ah! we have got to the condemnation of others, instead of the exaltation of self,’ said Lady Merrifield.

‘It is better to cultivate humility in one’s self than other people, eh?’ said the Marquis, and his cousin thought, though she did not say, that he was really the most humble and unself-conscious man she had

ever known. What she did say was, 'It is a plant that grows best uncultivated.'

'And if you have it not by happy nature, what then?' said Clement Underwood.

'Then I suppose you must plant it, and there will be plenty of tears of repentance to water it,' returned she.

'Thank you,' said Clement. 'That is an idea to work upon.'

'All very fine!' sighed Gillian to Mysie, 'but oh, how about Alexis in prison! There's papa, now he has got rid of Fangs, actually going to walk off with Uncle Sam, and mamma has let Lady Rotherwood get hold of her. Will nobody care for anybody?'

'I think I would trust papa,' said Mysie.

He was not long gone, and when he came back he said, 'You may give me that letter, Gillian. I posted a card to tell your aunt she should hear to-morrow.'

All that Gillian could say to her mother in private that evening consisted of, 'Oh, mamma, mamma,' but the answer was, 'I have heard about it from papa, my dear; I am glad you told him. He is thinking what to do. Be patient.'

Externally, awe and good manners forced Gillian to behave herself; but internally she was so far from patient, and had so many bitter feelings of indignation, that she felt deeply rebuked when she came down next morning to find her father hurrying through his breakfast, with a cab ordered to convey him to the

station, on his way to see what could be done for Alexis White.

That day Gillian had her confidential talk with her mother—a talk that she never forgot, trying to dig to the roots of her failures in a manner that only the true mother-confessor of her own child can perhaps have patience and skill for, and that only when she has studied the creature from babyhood. The concatenation, ending (if it was so to end) in the committal to Avonchester Jail, and beginning with the interview over the rails, had to be traced link by link, and was almost as long as ‘the house that Jack built.’

‘And now I see,’ said Gillian, ‘that it all came of a nasty sort of antagonism to Aunt Jane. I never guessed how like I was to Dolores, and I thought her so bad. But if I had only trusted Aunt Jane, and had no secrets, she would have helped me in it all, I know now, and never have brought the Whites into trouble.’

‘Yes,’ said Lady Merrifield; ‘perhaps I should have warned you a little more, but I went off in such a hurry that I had no time to think. You children are all very loyal to us ourselves; but I suppose you are all rather infected by the modern spirit, that criticises when it ought to submit to authorities.’

‘But how can one help seeing what is amiss? As some review says, how respect what does not make itself respectable? You know I don’t mean that for my aunts. I have learnt now what Aunt Jane really

is—how very kind and wise and clever and forgiving—but I was naughty enough to think her at first——’

‘Well, what? Don’t be afraid.’

‘Then I did think she was fidgety and worrying—always *at* one, and wanting to poke her nose into everything.’

‘Poor Aunt Jane! Those are the faults of her girlhood, which she has been struggling against all her life!’

‘But in your time, mamma, would such difficulties really not have been seen—I mean, if she had been actually what I thought her?’

‘I think the difference was that no faults of the elders were dwelt upon by a loyal temper. To find fault was thought so wrong that the defects were scarcely seen, and were concealed from ourselves as well as others. It would scarcely, I suppose, be possible to go back to that unquestioning state, now the temper of the times is changed; but I belong enough to the older days to believe that the true safety is in submission in the spirit as well as the letter.’

‘I am sure I should have found it so,’ said Gillian. ‘And oh! I hope, now that papa is come, the Whites may be spared any more of the troubles I have brought on them.’

‘We will pray that it may be so,’ said her mother.

CHAPTER XIX

THE KNIGHT AND THE DRAGON

A TELEGRAM had been received in the morning, which kept Valetta and Fergus on the *qui vive* all day. Valetta was an unspeakable worry to the patient Miss Vincent, and Fergus arranged his fossils and minerals.

Both children flew out to meet their father at the gate, but words failed them as he came into the house, greeted the aunts, and sat down with Fergus on his knee, and Valetta encircled by his arm.

‘Yes, Liliás is quite well, very busy and happy—with her first instalment of children.’

‘I am so thankful that you are come,’ said Adeline. ‘Jane ventured to augur that you would, but I thought it too much to hope for.’

‘There was no alternative,’ said Sir Jasper.

‘I infer that you halted at Avonchester.’

‘I did so; I saw the poor boy.’

‘What a comfort for his sister!’

‘Poor fellow! Mine was the first friendly face he had seen, and he was almost overcome by it’—and

the strong face quivered with emotion at the recollection of the boy's gratitude.

'He is a nice fellow,' said Jane. 'I am glad you have seen him, for neither Mr. White nor Rotherwood can believe that he is not utterly foolish, if not worse.'

'A boy may do foolish things without being a fool,' said Sir Jasper. 'Not that this one is such another as his father. I wish he were.'

'I suppose he has more of the student scholarly nature.'

'Yes. The enlistment, which was the making of his father, was a sort of moral suicide in him. I got him to tell me all about it, and I find that the idea of the inquest, and of having to mention you, you monkey, drove him frantic, and the dismissal completed the business.'

'I told them about it,' said Fergus.

'Quite right, my boy; the pity was that he did not trust to your honour, but he seems to have worked himself into the state of mind when young men run amuck. I saw his colonel, Lydiard, and the captain and sergeant of his company, who had from the first seen that he was a man of a higher class under a cloud, and had expected further enquiry, though, even from the little that had been seen of him, there was a readiness to take his word. As the sergeant said, he was not the common sort of runaway clerk, and it was a thousand pities that he must go to the civil power—in

which I am disposed to agree. What sort of man is the cousin at the marble works ?'

'A regular beast,' murmured Fergus.

'I think,' said Jane, 'that he means to be good and upright.'

'More than means,' said Ada ; 'but he is cautious, and says he has been so often deceived.'

'As far as I can understand,' said Jane, 'there was originally desperate enmity between him and his cousin.'

'He forgave entirely,' said Ada ; 'and he really has done a great deal for the family, who own that they have no claim upon him.'

'Yes,' said Jane, 'but from a distance, with no personal knowledge, and a contempt for the foreign mother, and the pretensions to gentility. He would have been far kinder if his cousin had remained a sergeant.'

'He only wished to try them,' said Adeline, 'and he always meant to come and see about them ; besides, that eldest son has been begging of him on false pretences all along.'

'That I can believe,' said Sir Jasper. 'I remember his father's distress at his untruth in the regimental school, and his foolish mother shielding him. No doubt he might do enough to cause distrust of his family ; but has Mr. White actually never gone near them, as Gillian told me ?'

'Excepting once walking Maura home,' said Jane,

‘no; but I ascribe all that to the partner, Mr. Stebbing, who has had it all his own way here, and seems to me to have systematically kept Alexis down to unnecessarily distasteful drudgery. Kalliope’s talent gave her a place; but young Stebbing’s pursuit of her, though entirely unrequited, has roused his mother’s bitter enmity, and there are all manner of stories afloat. I believe I could disprove every one of them; but together they have set Mr. White against her, and he cannot see her in her office, as her mother is too ill to be left. I do believe that if the case against Alexis is discharged, they will think she has the money.’

‘Stebbing said Maura changed a five-pound note,’ put in Fergus; ‘and when I told him to shut up, for it was all bosh, he punched me.’

‘I hope Richard sent it,’ said Ada; ‘but you see the sort of report that is continually before Mr. White—not that I think he believes half, or is satisfied with the Stebbings.’

‘I am sure he is not with Frank Stebbing,’ said Jane. ‘I do think and hope that he is only holding off in order to judge; and I think your coming may have a great effect upon him, Jasper.’

The Rotherwoods had requested Sir Jasper to use their apartments at the hotel, and he went thither to dress, being received, as he said, by little Lady Phyllis with much grace and simplicity.

The evening passed brightly, and when the children were gone to bed, their father said rather anxiously

that he feared the aunts had had a troublesome charge hastily thrust on them.

‘We enjoyed it very much,’ said Adeline politely.

‘We were thankful to have a chance of knowing the young people,’ added Jane. ‘I am only glad you did not come home at Christmas, when I was not happy about the two girls.’

‘Yes; Valetta got into trouble and wrote a piteous little letter of confession about copying.’

‘Yes, but you need not be uneasy about that; it was one of those lapses that teach women without any serious loss. She did not know what she was about, and she told no falsehoods; indeed, each one of your children has been perfectly truthful throughout.’

‘That is the great point, after all. Liliias could hardly fail to make her children true.’

‘Fergus is really an excellent little boy, and Gillian—poor Gillian—I think she really did want more experience, and was only too innocent.’

‘That is what you really think,’ said the father anxiously.

‘Yes, I do,’ said Jane. ‘If she had been a fast girl, she would have been on her guard against the awkward situation, and have kept out of this mess; but very likely would have run into a worse one.’

‘I do not think that her elder sisters would have done like her.’

‘Perhaps not; but they were living in your regimental world at the age when her schoolroom life was

going on. I think you have every reason to be satisfied with her tone of mind. As you said of the boy, a person may commit an imprudence without being imprudent.'

'I quite agree to that,' he said, 'and, indeed, I see that you have managed her most wisely, and obtained her affection and gratitude, as indeed you have mine!' he added, with a tone in his voice that touched Jane to the core of her heart.

'I never heard anything like it before,' she said to her sister over their fire at night, with a dew of pleasure in her eyes.

'I never liked Jasper so well before. He is infinitely pleasanter and more amiable. Do you remember our first visit? No, it was not you who went with me, it was Emily. I am sure he felt bound to be on guard all the time against any young officer's attentions to his poor little sister-in-law,' said Ada, with her Maid-of-Athens look. 'The smallest approach brought those hawk's eyes of his like a dart right through one's backbone. It all came back to me to-night, and the way he used to set poor Lily to scold me.'

'So that you rejoiced to be grown old. I beg your pardon, but I did. My experience was when I went to help Lily pack for foreign service, when I suppose my ferret look irritated him, for he snubbed me extensively, and I am sure he rejoiced to carry his wife out of reach of all the tribe. I dare say I richly

deserved it, but I hope we are all "mellered down," as Wat Greenwood used to say of his brewery for the pigs.'

'My dear, what a comparison!'

'Redolent of the Old Court, and of Lily, waiting for her swan's nest among the reeds, till her stately warrior came, and made her day dreams earnest in a way that falls to the lot of few. I don't think his severity ever dismayed her for a moment, there was always such sweetness in it.'

'True knight and lady! Yes. He is grown handsomer than ever, too!'

'I hope he will get those poor children out of their hobble! It is chivalrous enough of him to come down about it, in the midst of all his business in London.'

Sir Jasper started the next morning with Fergus on his way to school, getting on the road a good deal of information, mingled together about forms and strata, cricket and geology. Leaving his little son at Mrs. Edgar's door, he proceeded to Ivinghoe Terrace, where he waited long at the blistered door of the dilapidated house before the little maid informed him that Mr. Richard was gone out, and missus was so ill that she didn't know as Miss White could see nobody; but she took his card and invited him to walk into the parlour, where the breakfast things were just left.

Down came Kalliope, with a wan face and eyes worn with sleeplessness, but a light of hope and gratitude flashing over her features as she met the kind

eyes, and felt the firm hand of her father's colonel, a sort of king in the eyes of all Royal Wardours.

'My poor child,' he said gently, 'I am come to see if I can help you.'

'Oh! so good of you,' and she squeezed his hand tightly, in the effort perhaps not to give way.

'I fear your mother is very ill.'

'Very ill,' said Kalliope. 'Richard came last night, and he let her know what we had kept from her; but she is calmer now.'

'Then your brother Richard is here.'

'Yes; he is gone up to Mr. White's.'

'He is in a solicitor's office, I think. Will he be able to undertake the case?'

'Oh no, no'—the white cheek flushed, and the hand trembled. 'There is a Leeds family here, and he is afraid of their finding out that he has any connection with this matter. He says it would be ruin to his prospects.'

'Then we must do our best without him,' Sir Jasper said in a fatherly voice, inexpressively comforting to the desolate wounded spirit. 'I will not keep you long from your mother, but will you answer me a few questions? Your brother tells me——'

She looked up almost radiantly, 'You have seen him?'

'Yes. I saw him yesterday,' and as she gazed as if the news were water to a thirsty soul—'he sent his love, and begged his mother and you to forgive the

distress his precipitancy has caused. I did not think him looking ill; indeed, I think the quiet of his cell is almost a rest to him, as he makes sure that he can clear himself.'

'Oh, Sir Jasper! how can we ever be grateful enough!'

'Never mind that now, only tell me what is needful, for time is short. Your brother sent these notes in their own envelope, he says.'

'Yes, a very dirty one. I did not open it or see them, but enclosed it in one of my own, and sent it by my youngest brother, Petros.'

'How was yours addressed?'

'Francis Stebbing, Esq., Marble Works; and I put in a note in explanation.'

'Is the son's name likewise Francis?'

'Francis James.'

'Petros delivered it?'

'Yes, certainly.'

Here they were interrupted by Maura's stealing timidly in with the message that poor mamma had heard that Sir Jasper was here, and would he be so very good as to come up for one minute and speak to her.

'It is asking a great deal,' said Kalliope, 'but it would be very kind, and it might ease her mind.'

He was taken to the poor little bedroom full of oppressive atmosphere, though the window was open to relieve the labouring breath. It seemed absolutely

filled with the enormous figure of the poor dropsical woman with white ghastly face, sitting pillowed up, incapable of lying down.

‘Oh, so good! so angelic!’ she gasped.

‘I am sorry to see you so ill, Mrs. White.’

‘Ah! ’tis dying I am, Colonel Merrifield—begging your pardon, but the sight of you brings back the times when my poor captain was living, and I was the happy woman. ’Tis the thought of my poor orphans that is vexing me, leaving them as I am in a strange land where their own flesh and blood is unnatural to them,’ she cried, trying to clasp her swollen hands, in the excitement that brought out the Irish substructure of her nature. ‘Ah, Colonel dear, you’ll bear in mind their father that would have died for you, and be good to them.’

‘Indeed, I hope to do what I can for them.’

‘They are good children, Sir Jasper, all of them, even the poor boy that is in trouble out of the very warmth of his heart; but ’tis Richard who would be the credit to you, if you would lend him the helping hand. Where is the boy, Kally?’

‘He is gone to call on Mr. White.’

‘Ah! and you’ll say a good word for him with his cousin,’ she pleaded, ‘and say how ’tis no discredit to him if things are laid on his poor brother that he never did.’

The poor woman was evidently more anxious to bespeak patronage for her first-born, the pride and

darling of her heart, than for those who might be thought to need it more; but she became confused and agitated when she thought of Alexis, declaring that the poor boy might have been hasty, and have disgraced himself, but it was hard, very hard, if they swore away his liberty, and she never saw him more, and she broke into distressing sobs. Sir Jasper, in a decided voice, assured her that he expected with confidence that her son would be freed the next day, and able to come to see her.

‘It’s the blessing of a dying mother will be on you, Colonel dear! Oh! bring him back, that his mother’s eyes may rest on the boy that has always been dutiful. No—no, Dick, I tell you ’tis no disgrace to wear the coat his father wore.’ Wandering was beginning, and she was in no condition for Kalliope to leave her. The communicative Maura, who went downstairs with him, said that ‘Richard was so angry about Alexis that it had upset poor mamma sadly. And could Alexis come?’ she asked, ‘even when he is cleared.’

‘I will ask for furlough for him.’

‘Oh! thank you—that would do mamma more good than anything. She is so fond of Richard, he is her favourite; but Alexis is the real help and comfort.’

‘I can quite believe so. And now will you tell me where I shall find your brother who took the letter, Peter or Petros?’

‘Petros is his name, but the boys call him Peter.’

He is at school—the Bellevue National School—up that street.'

Repairing to that imposing building, Sir Jasper knocked at the door, and sent in his card by an astonished pupil-teacher with a request to the master that he might speak to Petros White, waiting in the porch till a handsome little fellow appeared, stouter, rosier, and more English looking than the others of his family, but very dusty, and rather scared.

'You don't remember me,' said Sir Jasper, 'but I was your father's colonel, and I want to find some way of helping your brother. Your sister tells me she gave you a letter to carry to Mr. Stebbing.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Where did you take it?'

'To his house, Carrara.'

'Was it not directed to the Marble Works?'

'Yes, but——'

'But what? Speak out, my man.'

'At the gate Blake, the porter, was very savage, and would not let us in. He said he would have no boys loafing about, we had done harm enough for one while, and he would set his dog at us.'

'Then you did not give him the letter?'

'No. I wouldn't after the way he pitched into me. I didn't know if he would give it. And he wouldn't hear a word, so we went up to Rockstone to the house.'

'Whom did you give it to there?'

'I dropped it into the slit in the door.'

‘ You only told your sister that you delivered it.’

‘ Yes, sir. Theodore said I must not tell sister ; it would only vex her more to hear how every one pitches into us, right and left,’ he said, with trembling lip.

‘ Is Theodore your next brother ?’

‘ Yes, sir.’

‘ Was he with you ?’

‘ No ; it was Sydney Grove.’

‘ Is he here ? Or—Did any one else see you leave the letter ?’

‘ Mr. Stebbing’s son—the young one, George, was in the drive and slanged us for not going to the back door.’

‘ That is important. Thank you, my boy. Give my—my compliments to your master, and ask him to be kind enough to spare this Sydney Grove to me for a few moments.’

This proved to be an amphibious-looking boy, older and rougher than Petros, and evidently his friend and champion. He was much less shy, and spoke out boldly, saying how he had gone with little Peter, and the porter had rowed them downright shameful, but it was nothing to that there young Stebbing ordering them out of the grounds for a couple of beastly cads, after no good. He (Grove) had a good mind to ha’ given ’un a good warming, only ’twas school time, and they was late as it was. Everybody was down upon the Whites, and it was a shame when they hadn’t done nothing, and he didn’t see as they was stuck up, not he.

Sir Jasper made a note of Master Grove's residence, and requested an interview with the master, from whom he obtained an excellent character of both the Whites, especially Theodore. The master lamented that this affair of their brother should have given a handle against them, for he wanted the services of the elder one as a monitor, eventually as a pupil-teacher, but did not know whether the choice would be advisable under the present circumstances. The boys' superiority made them unpopular, and excited jealousy among a certain set, though they were perfectly inoffensive, and they had much to go through in consequence of the suspicion that had fallen on their brother. Petros and Sydney should have leave from school whenever their testimony was wanted.

As Sir Jasper walked down the street, his elder sister-in-law emerged from a tamarisk-flanked gateway. 'This is your new abode, Jasper,' she said. 'Come in and see what you think of it! Well, have you had any success?'

He explained how the letter could be traced to Mr. Stebbing's house, and then consulted her whether to let all come out at the examination before the magistrates, or to induce the Stebbings to drop the prosecution.

'It would serve them right if it all came out in public,' she said.

'But would it be well?'

'One must not be vindictive! And to drag poor Kalliope to Avonchester would be a dreadful business

in her mother's state. Besides, Frank Stebbing is young, and it may be fair to give them a chance of hushing it up. I ought to be satisfied with clearing Alexis.'

'Then I will go to the house. When shall I be likely to find Mr. Stebbing?'

'Just after luncheon, I should say.'

'And shall I take the lawyer?'

'I should say not. If they hope to keep the thing secret, they will be the more amenable, but you should have the two boys within reach. Let us ask for them to come up after their dinner to Beechcroft. No, it must not be to dinner. Petros must not be sent to the kitchen, and Ada would expire if the other came to us! Now, do you like to see your house? Here is Macrae dying to see you.'

The old soldier had changed his quarters too often to be keenly interested in any temporary abode, provided it would hold the requisite amount of children, and had a pleasant sitting-room for his Lily, but he inspected politely and gratefully; and had a warmly affectionate interview with Macrae, who had just arrived with a great convoy of needfuls from Silverfold, and who undertook to bring up and guard the two boys from any further impertinences that might excite Master Grove's pugnacity.

It was a beautiful day, of the lamb-like entrance weather of March, and on the way home Miss Adeline was met taking advantage of the noontide sunshine to

exchange her book at the library, 'where,' she said, 'I found Mr. White reading the papers, so I asked him to meet Jasper at luncheon, thinking that may be useful.'

If Sir Jasper would rather have managed matters by himself, he forebore to say so, and he got on very well with Mr. White on subjects of interest, but, to the ladies' vexation, he waited to be alone before he began, 'I have come down to see what can be done for this poor young man, Mr. White, a connection of yours, I believe.'

'A bad business, Sir Jasper, a bad business.'

'I am sorry to hear you say so. I have seen a great deal of service with his father, and esteemed him very highly——'

'Ay, ay, very likely. I had a young man's differences with my cousin, as lads will fall out, but there was the making of a fine fellow in him. But it was the wife, bringing in that Greek taint, worse even than the Italian, so that there's no believing a word out of any of their mouths.'

'Well, the schoolmaster has just given me a high character of the younger one, for truthfulness especially.'

'All art, Sir Jasper, all art. They are deeper than your common English sort, and act it out better. I'll just give you an instance or two. That eldest son has been with me just now, a smart young chap, who swears he has been keeping his mother all this time—he has written to me often enough for help to do so. On the other hand, the little sister tells me, "Mamma always wants money to send to poor Richard." Then

again, Miss Mohun assures me that the elder one vows that she never encouraged Frank Stebbing for a moment, and to his mother's certain knowledge she is keeping up the correspondence.'

'Indeed,' said Sir Jasper. 'And may I ask what is your opinion as to this charge? I never knew a young man enlist with fifteen pounds in his pocket.'

'Spent it by the way, sir. Ran through it at billiards. Nothing more probable; it is the way with those sober-looking lads when something upsets them. Then when luck went against him, enlisted out of despair. Sister, like all women, ready to lie through thick and thin to save him, most likely even on oath.'

'However,' said Sir Jasper, 'I can produce independent witness that the youngest boy set off with the letter for the office, and the porter not admitting him, carried it to the house.'

'What became of it then?'

'Mr. Stebbing will have to answer that. I propose to lay the evidence before him in his own house, so that he may make inquiry, and perhaps find it, and drop the prosecution. Will you come with me?'

'Certainly, Sir Jasper. I should be very glad to think as you do. I came prepared to act kindly by these children, the only relations I have in the world; but I confess that what I have seen and heard has made me fear that they, at least the elder ones, are intriguing and undeserving. I should be glad of any proof to the contrary.'

Carrara was not far off, and they were just in time to catch Mr. Stebbing in his arm-chair, looking over his newspaper, before repairing to his office. Mrs. Stebbing stood up, half-flattered, half-fluttered, at the call of this stately gentleman, and was scarcely prepared to hear him say—

‘I have come down about this affair of young White’s. His father was my friend and brother-officer, and I am very anxious about him.’

‘I have been greatly disappointed in those young people, Sir Jasper,’ said Mr. Stebbing uneasily.

‘I understand that you are intending to prosecute Alexis White for the disappearance of the fifteen pounds he received on behalf of the firm.’

‘Exactly so, Sir Jasper. There’s no doubt that the carter, Field, handed it to him; he acknowledges as much, but he would have us believe that after running away with it, he returned it to his sister to send to me. Where is it? I ask.’

‘Yes,’ put in Mrs. Stebbing, ‘and the girl, the little one, changed a five-pound note at Glover’s.’

‘I can account for that,’ said Mr. White, with somewhat of an effort. ‘I gave her one for her sister, and charged them not to mention it.’

He certainly seemed ashamed to mention it before those who accounted it a weakness; and Sir Jasper broke the silence by proposing to produce his witnesses.

‘Really, Sir Jasper, this should be left for the court,’ said Mr. Stebbing.

‘It might be well to settle the matter in private, without dragging Miss White into Avonchester away from her dying mother.’

‘Those things are so exaggerated,’ said the lady.

‘I have seen her,’ said Sir Jasper gravely.

‘May I ask who these witnesses are?’ demanded Mr. Stebbing.

‘Two are waiting here—the messenger and his companion. Another is your porter at the marble works, and the fourth is your youngest son.’

This caused a sensation, and Mrs. Stebbing began—

‘I am sure I can’t tell what you mean, Sir Jasper.’

‘Is he in the house?’

‘Yes; he has a bad cold.’

Mrs. Stebbing opened the door and called ‘George,’ and on the boy’s appearance, Sir Jasper asked him—

‘Do you remember the morning of the 17th of last month—three days after the accident? I want to know whether you saw any one in the approach to the house.’

‘I don’t know what day it was,’ said the boy, somewhat sulkily.

‘You did see some one, and warned them off?’

‘I saw two little ca—two boys out of the town on the front door steps.’

‘Did you know them?’

‘No—that is to say, one was a fisherman’s boy.’

‘And the other?’

‘I thought he belonged to the lot of Whites.’

‘Should you know them again?’

‘I suppose so.’

‘Will you excuse me, and I will call them into the hall?’ said Sir Jasper.

This was effected, and Master George had to identify the boys, after which Sir Jasper elicited that Petros had seen the dirty envelope come out of his brother’s letter, and that his sister had put it into another, which she addressed as he described, and gave into his charge to deliver. Then came the account of the way he had been refused admittance by the porter.

‘Why didn’t you give him the letter?’ demanded Mr. Stebbing.

‘Catch us,’ responded Sydney Grove, rejoiced at the opportunity, ‘when what we got was, “Get out, you young rascals!”’

Petros more discreetly added—

‘My sister wanted it to be given to Mr. Stebbing, so we went up to the house to wait for him, but it got late for school, and I saw the postman drop the letters into the slit in the door, so I thought that would be all right.’

‘Did you see him do so?’ asked Sir Jasper of the independent witness.

‘Yes, sir; and *he* there’—pointing to George—
‘saw it too, and——’

‘Did you?’

‘Ay, and thought it like their impudence.’

‘That will do, my boys,’ said Sir Jasper. ‘Now run away.’

Mr. White put something into each paw as the door was opened and the pair made their exit.

If Sir Jasper acted as advocate, Mr. White seemed to take the position of judge.

‘There can be no doubt,’ he said, ‘that the letter containing the notes reached this house.’

‘No,’ said Mr. Stebbing hotly. ‘Why was I not told? Who cleared the letter-box?’

It was the page’s business; but to remember any particular letter on any particular day was quite beyond him, and he only stared wildly and said, ‘Dun no,’ on which he was dismissed to the lower regions.

‘The address was “Francis Stebbing, Esq.,”’ said Sir Jasper meditatively, perhaps like a spider pulling his cord.

‘Francis—your son’s name. Can he——’

‘Mr. White, I’ll thank you to take care what you say of my son!’ exclaimed Mrs. Stebbing; but there was a blank look of alarm on the father’s face.

‘Where is he?’ asked Mr. White.

‘He may be able to explain’—courtesy and pity made the General add.

‘No, no,’ burst out the mother. ‘He knows nothing of it. Mr. Stebbing, can’t you stand up for your own son?’

‘Perhaps,’ began the poor man, his tone faltering with a terrible anxiety, but his wife exclaimed hastily—

‘He never saw nor heard of it. I put it in the fire.’

There was a general hush, broken by Mr. Stebbing saying slowly—

‘You—put—it—in—the—fire.’

‘Yes; I saw those disreputable-looking boys put it into the box. I wasn’t going to have that bold girl sending billy-doo on the sly to my son.’

‘Under these circumstances,’ drily said Sir Jasper, ‘I presume that you will think it expedient to withdraw the prosecution.’

‘Certainly, certainly,’ said Mr. Stebbing, in the tone of one delivered from great alarm. ‘I will write at once to my solicitor at Avonchester.’ Then turning on his wife, ‘How was it that I never heard this before, and you let me go and make a fool of myself?’

‘How was I to know, Mr. Stebbing? You started off without a word to me, and all you told me when you came back was that the young man said he had posted the letter to his sister. I should like to know why he could not send it himself to the proper place!’

‘Well, Mrs. Stebbing,’ said her husband, ‘I hope it will be a lesson to you against making free with other people’s letters.’

She tossed her head, and was about to retire, when Sir Jasper said—

‘Before leaving us, madam, in justice to my old friend’s daughter, I should be much obliged if you would let me know your grounds for believing the letter to be what you say.’

‘Why—why, Sir Jasper, it has been going on this year or more! She has perfectly infatuated the poor boy.’

‘I am not asking about your son’s sentiments, but can you adduce any proof of their being encouraged!’

‘Sir Jasper! a young man doesn’t go on in that way without encouragement.’

‘What encouragement can you prove?’

‘Didn’t I surprise a letter from her——?’

‘Well’—checked the tone of triumphant conviction.

‘A refusal, yes, but we all know what that means, and that there must have been something to lead to it’—and as there was an unconvinced silence—‘Besides—oh, why, every one knew of her arts. You did, Mr. Stebbing, and of poor Frank’s infatuation. It was the reason of her dismissal.’

‘I knew what you told me, Mrs. Stebbing,’ he answered grimly, not at all inclined to support her at this moment of anger. ‘I am sure I wish I had never listened to you. I never saw anything amiss in the girl’s behaviour, and they are all at sixes and sevens without her at the mosaic work—though she is only absent from her mother’s illness at present.’

‘You! of course she would not show her goings on before you,’ said the lady.

‘Is Master Frank in the house?’ put in Mr. White; ‘I should like to put the question before him.’

‘You can’t expect a young man to make mortifying admissions,’ exclaimed the mother, and as she saw

smiles in answer she added, 'Of course, the girl has played the modest and proper throughout! That was her art, to draw him on, till he did not know what he was about.'

'Setting aside the supposed purpose,' said Sir Jasper, 'you admit, Mrs. Stebbing, that of your own knowledge, Miss White has never encouraged your son's attentions.'

'N—no; but we all know what those girls are.'

'Fatherless and unprotected,' said Sir Jasper, 'dependent on their own character and exertion, and therefore in especial need of kind construction. Good-morning, Mrs. Stebbing; I have learnt all that I wish to know.'

Overpowered, but not convinced, Mrs. Stebbing saw her visitors depart.

'And I hope her husband will give it to her well,' said Mr. White, as they left the house.

They looked in at Beechcroft Cottage with the tidings.

'All safe, I see!' cried Miss Jane. 'Is the money found?'

'No; Mrs. Stebbing burnt it, under the impression that it was a love-letter,' drily said Sir Jasper.

Miss Mohun led the way in the hearty fit of laughter, to which the gentlemen gave way the more heartily for recent suppression; and Mr. White added—

'I assure you, it was as good as a play to hear Sir

Jasper worm it out. One would think he had been bred a lawyer.'

'And now,' said the General, 'I must go and relieve that poor girl's suspense.'

'I will come with you,' volunteered Mr. White. 'I fully believe that she is a good girl, though this business and Master Richard's applications staggered me; and this soldier fellow must be an ass if he is not a scamp.'

'Scarcely that, I think,' said Miss Adelaide, with her pleading smile.

'Well, discipline will be as good for him as for his father,' said Mr. White. 'He has done for himself; but that was a nice little lad that you had up—too good for a common national school.'

Wherewith they departed, and found that Kalliope must have been on the watch, for she ran down to open the door to them, and the gladness which irradiated her face at Sir Jasper's first 'All right,' lighted up her features, which were so unlike the shop-girl prettiness that Mr. White expected as quite to startle him.

Richard was in the parlour in a cloud of smoke, and began to do the honours.

'Our acknowledgments are truly due to Sir Jasper. Mr. White, we are much honoured. Pray be seated. Please to excuse——'

They paid little attention to him, while Sir Jasper told as much to his sister as could well be explained as to the fate of her envelope, and added—

‘You will not be wanted at Avonchester, as the case will not come on. I shall go and see all safe, then on to town; but I mean to see your brother’s commanding officer, and you may tell your mother that I have no doubt that he will be allowed a furlough.’

‘But, Sir Jasper,’ broke in Richard, ‘I beg your pardon; but there is a family from Leeds at Bellevue, the Nortons, and imagine what it would be if they reported me as connected with a common private soldier, just out of prison too!’

‘Let him come to me then,’ exclaimed Mr. White.

In spite of appearances of disgust, Richard took the invitation to himself, and looked amiable and gratified.

‘Thank you, Mr. White, that will obviate the difficulty. When shall I move up?’

‘You, sir! Did you think I meant you?’ said Mr. White contemptuously. ‘No; I prefer a fool to a knave!’

‘Mr. White,’ interposed Sir Jasper, ‘whatever you may have to say to Richard White, consider his sister. Or had you not better report our success to your mother, my dear?’

‘One moment,’ said Mr. White. ‘Tell me, young lady, if you do not object, what assistance have you ever received from me.’

‘You have most kindly employed us, and paid for Maura’s education,’ said Kalliope.

‘Is that all? Has nothing been transmitted through this brother?’

‘I do not understand,’ said Kalliope, trembling, as Richard scowled at her.

‘Sir,’ said he, ‘I always intended, but unforeseen circumstances——’

‘That’s enough for the present, sir,’ said Mr. White. ‘I have heard all I wish, and more too.’

‘Sir,’ said Kalliope, still trembling, ‘indeed, Richard is a kind son and brother. My mother is much attached to him. I am generally out all day, and it is quite possible that she did not tell me all that passed between them, as she knew that I did not like you to be applied to.’

‘That will do, my dear,’ said Mr. White. ‘I don’t want to say any more about it. You shall have your brother to-morrow, if Sir Jasper can manage it. I will bring him back to Rockstone as my guest, so that his brother need not be molested with his company.’

CHAPTER XX

IVINGHOE TERRACE

ON an east-windy Friday afternoon Valetta and Fergus were in a crowning state of ecstasy. Rigdum Funnidos was in a hutch in the small garden under the cliff, Begum and two small gray kittens were in a basket under the kitchen stairs, Aga was purring under everybody's feet, Cocky was turning out the guard upon his perch—in short, Il Lido was made as like Silverfold as circumstances would permit. Aunt Ada with Miss Vincent was sitting on the sofa in the drawing-room, with a newly-worked cosy, like a giant's fez, over the teapot, and Valetta's crewel cushion fully displayed. She was patiently enduring a rush in and out of the room of both children and Quiz once every minute, and had only requested that it should not be *more* than once, and that the door should neither be slammed nor left open.

Macrae and the Silverfold carriage were actually gone to the station, and, oh! oh! oh! here it really was with papa on the box, and heaps of luggage, and here were Primrose and Gillian and mamma and Mrs.

Halfpenny, all emerging one after another, and Primrose, looking—oh dear! more like a schoolroom than a nursery girl—such a great piece of black leg below the little crimson skirt; but the dear little face as plump as ever.

That was the first apparent fact after the disengaging from the general embrace, when all had subsided into different seats, and Aunt Jane, who had appeared from somewhere in her little round sealskin hat, had begun to pour out the tea. The first sentence that emerged from the *melée* of greetings and intelligence was—

‘Fly met her mother at the station; how well she looks!’

‘Then Victoria came down with you?’

‘Yes; I am glad we went to her. I really do like her very much.’

Then Primrose and Valetta varied the scene by each laying a kitten in their mother’s lap; and Begum, jumping after her progeny, brushed Lady Merrifield’s face with her bushy tail, interrupting the information about names.

‘Come, children,’ said Sir Jasper, ‘that’s enough; take away the cats.’ It was kindly said, but it was plain that liberties with mamma would not continue before him.

‘The Whites?’ was Gillian’s question, as she pressed up to Aunt Jane.

‘Poor Mrs. White died the night before last,’ was the return. ‘I have just come from Kally. She is

in a stunned state now—actually too busy to think and feel, for the funeral must be to-morrow.’

Sir Jasper heard, and came to ask further questions.

‘She saw Alexis,’ went on Miss Mohun. ‘They dressed him in his own clothes, and she seemed greatly satisfied when he came to sit by her, and had forgotten all that went before. However, the end came very suddenly at last; and all those poor children show their southern nature in tremendous outbursts of grief—all except Kalliope, who seems not to venture on giving way, will not talk, or be comforted, and is, as it were, dried up for the present. The big brothers give way quite as much as the children, in gusts, that is to say. Poor Alexis reproaches himself with having hastened it, and I am afraid his brother does not spare him. But Mr. White has bought his discharge.’

‘You don’t mean it.’

‘Yes; whether it was the contrast between Alexis’s air of refinement and his private soldier’s turn-out, or the poor fellow’s patience and submission, or the brother’s horrid behaviour to him, Mr. White has taken him up, and bought him out.’

‘All because of Richard’s brutal speech. That is good! Though I confess I should have let the lad have at least a year’s discipline for his own good, since he had put himself into it; but I can’t be sorry. There is something engaging about the boy.’

‘And Mr. White is the right man to dispose of them.’

No more passed, for here were the children eager and important, doing the honours of the new house, and intensely happy at the sense of home, which with them depended more on persons than on place.

‘One schoolroom again,’ said Mysie. ‘One again with Val and Prim and Miss Vincent. Oh, it is happiness!’

Even Mrs. Halfpenny was a delightful sight, perhaps the more so that her rightful dominion was over; the nursery was no more, and she was only to preside in the workroom, be generally useful, wait on my lady, and look after Primrose as far as was needful.

The bustle and excitement of settling in prevented much thought of the Whites, even from Gillian, during that evening and the next morning; and she was ashamed of her own oblivion of her friend in the new current of ideas, when she found that her father meant to attend the funeral out of respect to his old fellow-soldier.

Rockquay had outgrown its churchyard, and had a cemetery half a mile off, so that people had to go in carriages. Mr. White had made himself responsible for expenses, and thus things were not so utterly dreary as poverty might have made them. It was a dreary, gusty March day, with driving rushes of rain, which had played wildly with Gillian’s waterproof while she was getting such blossoms and evergreen

leaves as her aunt's garden afforded, not out of love for the poor Queen of the White Ants herself, but thinking the attention might gratify the daughters; and her elders moralised a little on the use and abuse of wreaths, and how the manifestation of tender affection and respect had in many cases been imitated in empty and expensive compliment.

'The world spoils everything with its coarse finger,' said Lady Merrifield.

'I hope the custom will not be exaggerated altogether out of fashion,' said Jane. 'It is a real comfort to poor little children at funerals to have one to carry, and it is as Mrs. Gaskell's Margaret said of mourning, something to prevent settling to doing nothing but crying; besides that afterwards there is a wholesome sweetness in thus keeping up the memory.'

Sir Jasper shared a carriage with Mr. White, and returned somewhat wet and very cold, and saying that it had been sadly bleak and wretched for the poor young people, who stood trembling, so far as he could see; and he was anxious to know how the poor girls were after it. It had seemed to him as if Kalliope could scarcely stand. He proved to be right. Kalliope had said nothing, not wept demonstratively, perhaps not at all; but when the carriage stopped at the door, she proved to be sunk back in her corner in a dead faint. She was very long in reviving, and no sooner tried to move than she swooned again, and this time it lasted so long that the doctor was sent for. Miss Mohun

arrived just as he had partially restored her, and they had a conversation.

‘They must get that poor girl to bed as soon as it is possible to undress her,’ he said. ‘I have seen that she must break down sooner or later, and I’m afraid she is in for a serious illness; but as yet there is no knowing.’

Nursing was not among Jane’s accomplishments, except of her sister Ada’s chronic, though not severe ailments; but she fetched Mrs. Halfpenny as the most effective person within reach, trusting to that good woman’s Scotch height, strong arms, great decision, and the tenderness which real illness always elicited.

Nor was she wrong. Not only did Mrs. Halfpenny get the half-unconscious girl into bed, but she stayed till evening, and then came back to snatch a meal and say—

‘My leddy, if you have no objection, I will sit up with that puir lassie the night. They are all men-folk or bairns there, except the lodger-lady, who is worn out with helping the mother, and they want some one with a head on her shoulders.’

Lady Merrifield consented with all her heart; but the Sunday morning’s report was no better, when Mrs. Halfpenny came home to dress Primrose, and see her lady.

‘That eldest brother, set him up, the idle loon, was off by the mail train that night, and naething wad serve him but to come in and bid good-bye to his

sister just as I had gotten her off into something more like a sleep. It startled her up, and she went off her head again, poor dearie, and began to talk about prison and disgrace, and what not, till she fainted again; and when she came to, I was fain to call the other lad to pacify her, for I could see the trouble in her puir een, though she could scarce win breath to speak.'

'Is Alexis there?'

'Surely he is, my leddy; he's no the lad to leave his sister in sic a strait. It was all I could do to gar him lie down when she dozed off again, but there's sair stress setting in for all of them, poor things. I have sent the little laddie off to beg the doctor to look in as soon as he can, for I am much mistaken if there be not fever coming on.'

'Indeed! And what can those poor children do?'

'That's what I'm thinking, my leddy. And since 'tis your pleasure that the nursery be done awa' wi', and I have not ta'en any fresh work, I should like weel to see the puir lassie through wi' it. Ye'll no mind that Captain White and my puir Halfpenny listed the same time, and always forgathered as became douce lads. The twa of them got their stripes thegither, and when Halfpenny got his sunstroke in that weary march, 'twas White who gave him his last sup of water, and brought me his bit Bible. So I'd be fain to tend his daughter in her sickness, if you could spare me, my leddy, and I'd aye rin home to dress Missie Primrose and pit her to bed, and see to matters here.'

‘There’s no better nurse in the world, dear old Halfpenny,’ said Lady Merrifield, with tears in her eyes. ‘I do feel most thankful to you for proposing it. Never mind about Primrose, only you must have your meals and a good rest here, and not knock yourself up.’

Mrs. Halfpenny smiled grimly at the notion of her being sooner knocked up than a steam-engine. Dr. Dagger entirely confirmed her opinion that poor Kalliope was likely to have a serious illness, low nervous fever, and failing action of the heart, no doubt from the severe strain that she had undergone, more or less, for many months, and latterly fearfully enhanced by her mother’s illness, and the shock and suspense about Alexis, all borne under the necessity of external composure and calmness, so that even Mrs. Lee had never entirely understood how much it cost her. The doctor did not apprehend extreme danger to one young and healthy, but he thought much would depend on good nursing, and on absolute protection from any sort of excitement, so that such care as Mrs. Halfpenny’s was invaluable, since she was well known to be a dove to a patient, but a dragon to all outsiders.

Every one around grieved at having done so little to lighten these burthens, and having even increased them, her brother Alexis above all; but on the other hand, he was the only person who was of any use to her, or was suffered to approach her, since his touch

and voice calmed the recurring distress, lest he were still in prison and danger.

Alexis went back dutifully on the Monday morning to his post at the works. The young man was much changed by his fortnight's experiences, or rather he had been cured of a temporary fit of distraction, and returned to his better self. How many discussions his friends held about him cannot be recorded, but after a conversation with Mr. Flight, with whom he was really more unreserved than any other being except Kalliope, this was the understanding at which Miss Mohun and Lady Merrifield arrived as to his nature and character.

Refined, studious, and sensitive, thoroughly religious-minded, and of a high tone of thought, his aspirations had been blighted by his father's death, his brother's selfishness, and his mother's favouritism. In a brave spirit of self-abnegation, he had turned to the uncongenial employment set before him for the sake of his family, and which was rendered specially trying by the dislike of his fellows to 'the gentleman cove,' and the jealousy of the Stebbings. Alike for his religious and his refined habits he had suffered patiently, as Mr. Flight had always known more or less, and now bore testimony. The curate, who had opened to him the first door of hope and comfort, had in these weeks begun to see that the apparent fitfulness of his kindness had been unsettling.

Then came the brief dream of felicity excited by Gillian and the darkness of its extinction, just as Frank

Stebbing's failure and the near approach of Mr. White had made the malice of his immediate superiors render his situation more intolerable than ever. There was the added sting of self-reproach for his presumption towards Gillian, and the neglect caused by his fit of low spirits. Such a sensitive being, in early youth, wearied and goaded on all sides, might probably have persevered through the darkness till daylight came; but the catastrophe, the dismissal, and the perception that he could only defend himself at the expense of his idol's little brother, all exaggerated by youthful imagination, were too much for his balance of judgment, and he fled without giving himself time to realise how much worse he made it for those he left behind him.

Of course he perceived it all now, and the more bitterly from his sister's wanderings, but the morbid exaggeration was gone. The actual taste of a recruit's life had shown him that there were worse things than employment at the quarries with his home awaiting him; and his cell had been a place of thought and recovery of his senses. He had never seriously expected conviction, and Sir Jasper's visit had given him a spring of hopeful resignation, in which thoughts stirred of doing his duty, and winning his way after his father's example, and taking the trials of his military life as the just cross of his wrong-doing in entering it.

His liberation and Mr. White's kindness had not altered this frame. He was too unhappy to feel his residence in the great house anything but a restraint;

he could not help believing that he had hastened his mother's death, and could only bow his head meekly under his brother's reproaches, alike for that and for his folly and imprudence and the disgrace he had brought on the family.

'And now you'll be currying favour and cutting out every one else,' had been a sting which added fresh force to Alexis's desire to escape from his kinsman's house to sleep at home as soon as his brother had gone ; and Richard had seen enough of Sir Jasper and of Mr. White to be anxious to return to his office at Leeds as soon as possible, and to regulate his affairs beyond their reach.

Alexis knew that he had avoided a duty in not working out his three months' term, and likewise that his earnings were necessary to the family all the more for his sister being laid aside. He knew that he hardly deserved to resume his post, and he merely asked permission so to do, and it was granted at once, but curtly and coldly.

Mr. Flight had asked if he had not found the going among the other clerks very trying.

'I had other things to think of,' said Alexis sadly, then recalling himself. 'Yes ; Jones did sneer a little, but the others stopped that. They knew I was down, you see.'

'And you mean to go on ?'

'If I may. That, and for my sister to get better, is all I can dare to hope. My madness and selfishness

have shown me unworthy of all that I once dreamt of.'

In that resolution it was assuredly best to leave him, only giving him such encouragement and sympathy as might prevent that more dangerous reaction of giving up all better things; and Sir Jasper impressed on Mr. Flight, the only friend who could have aided him in fulfilling his former aspirations, that Mr. White had in a manner purchased the youth by buying his discharge, and that interference would not only be inexpedient, but unjust. The young clergyman chafed a little over not being allowed to atone for his neglect; but Sir Jasper was not a person to be easily gainsayed. Nor could there be any doubt that Mr. White was a good man, though in general so much inclined to reserve his hand that his actions were apt to take people by surprise at last, as they had never guessed his intentions, and he had a way of sucking people's brains without in the least letting them know what use he meant to make of their information. The measures he was taking for the temporal, intellectual, and spiritual welfare of the people at the works would hardly have been known except for the murmurs of Mrs. Stebbing, although, without their knowing what he was about with them, Mr. Stebbing himself, Mr. Hablot, Miss Mohun, to say nothing of Alexis, the foremen and the men and their wives, had given him the groundwork of his reforms. Meantime, he came daily to inquire for Kalliope, and lavished on her all that could be an alleviation, greatly

offending Mrs. Halfpenny by continually proffering the services of a hospital nurse.

‘A silly tawpie that would be mair trouble than half a dozen sick,’ as she chose to declare.

She was a born autocrat, and ruled as absolutely in No. 1 as in her nursery, ordering off the three young ones to their schools, in spite of Maura’s remonstrances and appeals to Lady Merrifield, who agreed with nurse that the girl was much better away and occupied than where she could be of very little use.

Indeed, Mrs. Halfpenny banished every one from the room except Mrs. Lee and Alexis, whom she would allow to take her place, while she stalked to Il Lido for her meals, and the duties she would not drop. As to rest, she always, in times of sickness, seemed to be made of cast iron, and if she ever slept at all, it was in a chair, while Alexis sat by his sister in the evening.

The fever never ran very high, but constant vigilance was wanted from the extreme exhaustion and faintness. There was no violent delirium, but more of delusion and distress; nor was it easy to tell when she was conscious or otherwise, for she hardly spoke, and as yet the doctor forbade any attempt to rouse her more than was absolutely needful. They were only to give nourishment, watch her, and be patient.

A few months ago Gillian would have fussed herself into a frantic state of anxiety and self-reproach; but her parents, when her mother had once heard as much

outpouring as she thought expedient, would not permit what Sir Jasper called 'perpetual harping.'

'You have to do your duties all the same, and not worry your mother and all the family with your feelings,' he said.

She thought it very unkind, and went away crying.

'Nobody could hinder her from thinking about Kalliope,' she said to herself, and think she did at her prayers, and when the bulletins came in; but the embargo on discussion prevented her from being so absolutely engrossed, as in weaker hands she might have been, and there was a great deal going on to claim her attention. For one thing, the results of the Cambridge Examination showed that while Emma Norton and a few others had passed triumphantly, she had failed, and conscience carried her back to last autumn's disinclination to do just what Aunt Jane especially recommended.

She cried bitterly over the failure, for she had a feeling that success there would redeem her somewhat in her parents' eyes; but here again she experienced the healing kindness of her father. He would not say that he should not have been much pleased by her success, but he said failure that taught her to do her best without perverseness was really a benefit; and as arithmetic and mathematics had been her weakest points, he would work at them with her and Mysie for an hour every morning.

It was somewhat formidable, but the girls soon

found that what their father demanded was application, and that inattention displeased him much more than stupidity. His smile, though rare, was one of the sweetest things in the world, and his approbation was delightful, and gave a stimulus to the entire day's doings. Mysie was more than ever in dread of being handed over to the Rotherwoods, though her love for poor Fly and pity for her solitude were so strong. She would have been much relieved if she had known what had passed; when the offer was seriously made, Lord Rotherwood insisted that his wife should do it.

‘Then they will believe in it,’ he said.

‘I do not know why you should say that,’ she returned, always dutifully blinding herself to that which all their intimates knew perfectly well. However, perhaps from having a station and dignity of her own, together with great simplicity, Lady Merrifield had from her first arrival got on so well with her hostess as not quite to enter into Jane’s sarcastic descriptions of her efforts at cordiality; and it was with real warmth that Lady Rotherwood begged for Mysie as a permanent companion and adopted sister to Phyllis, who was to be taken back to London after Easter, and in the meantime spent every possible moment with her cousins. Tears at the unkindness to lonely Fly came into Lady Merrifield’s eyes as she said—

‘I cannot do it, Victoria; I do not think I ought to give away my child, even if I could.’

‘It is not only our feelings,’ added Sir Jasper, ‘but

it is our duty to bring up our own child in her natural station ; and though we know she would learn nothing but good in your family, I cannot think it well that a girl should acquire habits, and be used to society ways and of life beyond those which she can expect to continue.'

They both cried out at this, Lord Rotherwood with a halting declaration of perfect equality, which his lady seconded, with a dexterous reference to connections.

'We will not put it on rank then,' said Sir Jasper, 'but on wealth. With you, Maria must become accustomed to much that she could not continue, and had better not become natural to her. I know there are great advantages to manners and general cultivation in being with you, and we shall be most thankful to let her pay long visits, and be as much with Phyllis as is consistent with feeling her home with us, but I cannot think it right to do more.'

'But with introductions,' pleaded Lady Rotherwood, 'she might marry well. With her family and connections, she would be a match for any one.'

'I hope so,' said Sir Jasper ; 'but at the same time it would not be well for her to look on such a marriage as the means of continuing the habits that would have become second nature.'

'Poor Mysie,' exclaimed Lord Rotherwood, bursting out laughing at the idea, and at Lady Merrifield's look as she murmured, 'My Mysie !'

'You misunderstand me,' said the Marchioness

composedly. 'I was as far as possible from proposing marriage as a speculation for her.'

'I know you were,' said Sir Jasper. 'I know you would deal by Maria as by your own daughter, and I am very grateful to you, Lady Rotherwood; but I can only come back to my old decision, that as Providence did not place her in your rank of life, she had better not become so accustomed to it as to render her own distasteful to her.'

'Exactly what I expected,' said Lord Rotherwood.

'Yes,' returned his wife, with an effort of generosity; 'and I believe you are right, Jasper, though I am sorry for my little solitary girl, and I never saw a friend so perfectly suitable for her as your Mysie.'

'They may be friends still,' said Lord Rotherwood, 'and we will be grateful to you whenever you can spare her to us.'

'Perhaps,' added Sir Jasper, 'all the more helpful friends for seeing different phases of life.'

'And,' said his wife, with one of her warm impulses, 'I do thank you, Victoria, for so loving my Mysie.'

'As if any one could help it, after last winter,' said that lady, and an impromptu kiss passed between the two mothers, much to the astonishment of the Marquis, who had never seen his lady so moved towards any one.

The Merrifields were somewhat on the world, for Sir Jasper, on going to Silverfold and corresponding with the trustees of the landlord, had found that the

place could not be put in a state either of repair or sanitation, such as he approved, without more expense than either he or the trustees thought advisable, and he decided on giving it up, and remaining at Il Lido till he could find something more suitable.

The children, who had been there during the special home-making age, bewailed the decision, and were likely always to look back on Silverfold as a sort of Paradise; but the elder ones had been used to changes from infancy, and had never settled down, and their mother said that place was little to her as long as she had her Jasper by her side; and as to the abstract idea of home as a locality, that would always be to her under the tulip-tree and by the pond at the Old Court at Beechcroft, just as her abstract idea of church was in the old family pew, with the carved oak panels, before the restoration, in which she had been the most eager of all.

Thus a fortnight passed, and then the fever was decidedly wearing off, but returning at night. Kalliope still lay weak, languid, silent, fainting at any attempt to move her, not apparently able to think enough to ask how time passed, or to be uneasy about anything, simply accepting the cares given to her, and lying still. One morning, however, Alexis arrived in great distress to speak to Sir Jasper, not that his sister was worse, as he explained, but Richard had been selling the house. The younger ones at home had never troubled themselves as to whose property the three houses in

Ivinghoe Terrace were. Perhaps Kalliope knew, but she could not be asked; but the fact was that Captain White had been so lost sight of, that he had not known that this inheritance had fallen to him under the will of his grandfather, who was imbecile at the time of his flight. On his deathbed, the Captain had left the little he owned to his wife, and she had died intestate, as Richard had ascertained before leaving home, so that he, as eldest son, was heir to the ground. He had written to Kalliope, a letter which Alexis had opened, informing her that he had arranged to sell the houses to a Mr. Gudgeon, letting to him their own till the completion of the legal business necessary, and therefore desiring his brothers and sisters to move out with their lodgers, if not by Lady Day itself, thus giving only a week's spare notice, at latest by Old Lady Day.

‘Is he not aware of your sister’s state?’

‘I do not imagine that he has read the letter that I wrote to him. He was very much displeased with me, and somewhat disposed to be angry at my sister’s fainting, and to think that we were all trying to work on his feelings. He used to be rather fond of Maura, so I told her to write to him; but he has taken no notice, and he can have no conception of Kalliope’s condition, or he would not have addressed his letter to her. I came to ask if you would kindly write to him how impossible it is to move her.’

‘You had better get a certificate from Dr. Dagger.

Either I or Lady Merrifield will meet him, and see to that. That will serve both to stay him and the purchaser.'

'That is another misfortune. This Gudgeon is the chief officer, or whatever they call it, of the Salvation Army. I knew they had been looking out for a place for a barracks, and could not get one because almost everything belongs to Lord Rotherwood or to Mr. White.'

Sir Jasper could only reply that he would see what could be done in the matter, and that, at any rate, Kalliope should not be disturbed.

Accordingly Lady Merrifield repaired to Ivinghoe Terrace for the doctor's visit, and obtained from him the requisite certificate that the patient could not be removed at present. He gave it, saying, however, to Lady Merrifield's surprise, that though he did not think it would be possible to remove her in a week's time, yet after that he fully believed that she would have more chance of recovering favourably if she could be taken out of the small room and the warm atmosphere beneath the cliffs—though of course all must depend on her state at the time.

Meantime there was a council of the gentlemen about out-bidding the Salvation Army. Lord Rotherwood was spending already as much as he could afford, in the days of agricultural depression, on the improvements planned with Mr. White. That individual was too good a man of business to fall, as he said, into the

trap, and make a present to that scamp Richard of more than the worth of the houses, and only Mr. Flight was ready to go to *any* cost to keep off the Salvation Army; but the answer was curt. Richard knew he had no chance with Mr. White, and did not care to keep terms with him.

‘Mr. Richard White begs to acknowledge the obliging offer of the Rev. Augustine Flight, and regrets that arrangements have so far progressed with Mr. Gudgeon that he cannot avail himself of it.’

Was this really regret or was the measure out of spite? Only the widest charity could accept the former suggestion; and even Sir Jasper Merrifield’s brief and severe letter and Dr. Dagger’s certificate did not prevent a letter to Alexis, warning him not to make their sister’s illness a pretext for unreasonable delay.

What was to be done? Kalliope was still unfit to be consulted or even informed, and she had been hitherto so entirely the real head and manager of the family that Alexis did not like to make any decision without her; and even the acceptance of the St. Wulstan’s choristership for Theodore had been put off for her to make it, look to his outfit, and all that only the woman of the family could do for them.

And here they were at a loss for a roof over their heads, and nowhere to bestow the battered old furniture, of which Richard magnanimously renounced his sixth share; while she who had hitherto toiled, thought,

managed, and contrived for all the other four, without care of their own, still lay on her bed, sensible indeed and no longer feverish, but with the perilous failure of heart, renewed by any kind of exertion or excitement, a sudden movement, or a startling sound in the street; and Mrs. Halfpenny, guarding her as ferociously as ever, and looking capable of murdering any one of her substitutes if they durst hint a word of their perplexities. Happily she asked no questions; she was content when allowed to be kissed by the others, and to see they were well. Nature was enforcing repose, and so far 'her senses was all as in a dream bound up.' Alexis remembered that it had been somewhat thus at Leeds, when, after nursing all the rest, she had succumbed to the epidemic; but then the mother had been able to watch over her, and had been a more effective parent to the rest than she had since become.

The first practical proposal was Mrs. Lee's. They thought of reversing the present position, and taking a small house where their present hosts might become their lodgers. Moreover, Miss Mohun clenched the affair about Theodore, and overcame Alexis's scruples, while Lady Merrifield, having once or twice looked in, and been smiled at and thanked by Kalliope, undertook to prepare her for his farewell.

Alexis and Maura both declared that she would instantly jump up, and want to begin looking over his socks; but she got no further than—

'Dear boy! It is the sort of thing I always

wished for him. People are very good! But his things——'

'Oh yes, dearie, ye need not fash yourself. I've mended them as I sat by you, and packed them all. Lie still. They are all right.'

There was an atmosphere of the Royal Wardours about Mrs. Halfpenny, which was at once congenial and commanding; and Kalliope's mind at once relinquished the burthen of socks, shirts, and even the elbows of the outgrown jacket, nor did any of the family ever know how the deficiencies had been supplied.

And when Theodore, well admonished, came softly and timidly for the parting kiss, his face quivering all over with the effort at self-control, she lay and smiled; but with a great crystal tear on each dark eyelash, and her thin transparent fingers softly stroked his cheeks, as the low weak voice said—

'Be a good boy, dear—speak truth. Praise God well. Write; I'll write when I am better.'

It was the first time she had spoken of being better, and they told Theodore to take comfort from it when all the other three walked him up to the station.

CHAPTER XXI

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

IN the search for a new abode Mrs. Lee was in much difficulty, for it was needful to be near St. Kenelm's, and the only vacant houses within her means were not desirable for the reception of a feeble convalescent; moreover, Mr. Gudgeon grumbled and inquired, and was only withheld by warnings enhanced by the police from carrying the whole charivari of the Salvation Army along Ivinghoe Terrace on Sunday afternoon.

Perhaps it was this, perhaps it was the fact of having discussed the situation with the two Miss Mohuns, that made Mr. White say to Alexis, 'There are two rooms ready for your sister, as soon as Dagger says she can be moved safely. The person who nurses her had better come with her, and you may as well come back to your old quarters.'

Alexis could hardly believe his ears, but Mr. White waved off all thanks. The Mohun sisters were delighted and triumphant, and Jane came down to talk it over with her elder sister, auguring great things from that man who loved to deal in surprises.

‘That is true,’ said Sir Jasper.

‘What does that mean, Jasper?’ said his wife. ‘It sounds significant.’

‘I certainly should not be amazed if he did further surprise us all. Has it never struck you how that noontide turn of Adeline’s corresponds with his walk home from the reading-room?’

Lady Merrifield looked rather startled, but Jane only laughed, and said, ‘My dear Jasper, if you only knew Ada as well as I do! Yes, I have seen far too many of those little affairs to be taken in by them. Poor Ada! I know exactly how she looks, but she is only flattered, like a pussy-cat waggling the end of its tail—it means nothing, and never comes to anything. The thing that is likely and hopeful is, that he may adopt those young people as nephews and nieces.’

‘Might it not spoil them?’ said Lady Merrifield.

‘Oh! I did not mean that. They might work with him still. However, there is no use in settling about that. The only thing to be expected of him is the unexpected!’

‘And the thing to be done,’ added her sister, ‘is to see how and when that poor girl can be got up to Cliff House.’

To the general surprise, Dr. Dagger wished the transit to take place without loss of time. A certain look of resigned consternation crossed Kalliope’s face on being informed of her destiny; but she justified Mrs. Halfpenny’s commendation of her as the maist

douce and conformable patient in the world, for she had not energy enough even to plead against anything so formidable, and she had not yet been told that Ivinghoe Terrace was her home no longer.

The next day she was wrapped in cloaks and carried downstairs between her brother and Mrs. Halfpenny, laid on a mattress in the Merrifield waggonette, which went up the hill at a foot's pace, and by the same hands, with her old friend the caretaker's wife going before, was taken upstairs to a beautiful large room, with a window looking out on vernal sky and sea. She was too much exhausted on her arrival to know anything but the repose on the fresh comfortable bed, whose whiteness was almost rivalled by her cheek, and Mrs. Halfpenny ordered off Alexis, who was watching her in great anxiety. However, when he came back after his afternoon's work, it was to find that she had eaten and slept, and now lay, with her eyes open, in quiet interested admiration of a spacious and pleasant bedroom, such as to be a great novelty to one whose life had been spent in cheap lodging-houses. The rooms had been furnished twenty years before as a surprise intended for the wife who never returned to occupy them, and though there was nothing extraordinary in them, there was much to content the eyes accustomed to something very like squalidness, for had not Kalliope's lot always been the least desirable chamber in the family quarters?

At any rate, from that moment she began to recover,

ate with appetite, slept and woke to be interested, and to enjoy Theodore's letter of description of St. Wulstan's, and even to ask questions. Alexis was ready to dance for joy when she first began really to talk to him; and could not forbear imparting his gladness to the Miss Mohuns that very evening, as well as to Mr. White; and running down after dinner with the good news to Maura, Mrs. Lee, and Lady Merrifield. Dinners with Mr. White had, on his first sojourn in that house, been a great penance, though there were no supercilious servants, for all the waiting was by the familiar housekeeper, Mrs. Osborne, who had merely added an underling to her establishment on her master's return; but Alexis then had been utterly miserable, feeling guilty and ashamed, as one only endured on sufferance out of compassion, because his brother cast him out, and fresh from the sight of his mother's dying bed; a terrible experience altogether, which had entirely burnt out and effaced his foolish fit of romantic calf-love, and rendered him much more of a man. Now, though not a month had passed, he seemed to be on a different footing. He was doing his work steadily, and the hope of his sister's recovery had brightened him. Mr. White had begun to talk to him, to ask him questions about the doings of the day, and to tell him in return some of his own experiences in Italy, and in the earlier days of the town. Maura came up to see her sister every day, and tranquillised her mind when the move was explained, and anxiety

as to the transport of all their worldly goods began to set in. Mrs. Lee had found a house where she could place two bedrooms and a sitting-room at the disposal of the Whites if things were to continue as before, and no hint had been given of any change, or of what was to happen when the three months' notice given to Kalliope and Alexis should have expired.

By the Easter holidays Mrs. Halfpenny began to get rather restless as to the overlooking of the boys' wardrobes; and, indeed, she thought so well of her patient's progress as to suggest to Mr. White that the lassie would do very well if she had her sister to be with her in the holidays, and she herself would come up every day to help at the getting up, for Kalliope was now able to be dressed and to lie on a couch in the dressing-room, where she could look out over the bay, and she had even asked for some knitting.

'And really, Miss Gillian, you could not do her much harm if you came up to see her,' said the despot. 'So you may come this very afternoon, if ye'll be douce, and not fash her with any of your cantrips.'

Gillian did not feel at all in a mood for cantrips as she slowly walked up the broad staircase, and was ushered into the dressing-room, cheerful with bright fire and April sunshine, and with a large comfortable sofa covered with a bright rug, where Kalliope could enjoy both window and fire without glare. The beauty of her face so much depended on form and expression that her illness had not lessened it. Gillian had

scarcely seen her since the autumn, and the first feeling was what an air of rest and peace had succeeded the worn, harassed look then almost perpetual. There was a calmness now that far better suited the noble forehead, dark pencilled eyebrows, and classical features in their clear paleness; and with a sort of reverence Gillian bent over her, to kiss her and give her a bunch of violets. Then, when the thanks had passed, Gillian relieved her own shyness by exclaiming with admiration at a beautiful water-coloured copy of an early Italian fresco, combining the Nativity and Adoration of the Magi, that hung over the mantelpiece.

‘Is it not exquisite?’ returned Kalliope. ‘I do so much enjoy making out each head and dwelling on them! Look at that old shepherd’s simple wonder and reverence, and the little child with the lamb, and the contrast with the Wise Man from the East, whose eyes look as if he saw so much by faith.’

‘Can you see it from there?’ asked Gillian, who had got up to look at these and further details dwelt on by Kalliope.

‘Yes. Not at first; but they come out on me by degrees. It is such a pleasure, and so kind of Mr. White to have put it there. He had it hung there, Mrs. Halfpenny told me, instead of his own picture just before I came in here.’

‘Well, he is not a bad-looking man; but it is no harm to him or his portrait to say that this is better to look at!’

‘It quite does me good! And see,’ pointing to a photograph of the Arch of Titus hung on the screen that shielded her from the door, ‘he sends in a fresh one by Alexis every other day.’

‘How very nice! He really seems to be a dear old man. Don’t you think so?’

‘I am sure he is wonderfully kind; but I have only seen him that once when he came with Sir Jasper, and then I knew nothing but that when Sir Jasper was come things must go right.’

‘Of course; but has he never been to see you now that you are up and dressed?’

‘No; he lavishes anything on me that I can possibly want; but I have only seen him once—never here.’

‘It is like Beauty and the Beast!’

‘Oh no, no; don’t say that!’

‘Well, George Stebbing really taught Fergus to call him a beast, and you—Kally—I won’t tease you with saying what you are.’

‘I wish I wasn’t; it would be all so much easier.’

‘Never mind! I do believe the Stebbings are going away! Does Maura never see him?’

‘She has met him on the stairs and in the garden; but she has her meals here. I trust by the time her Easter holidays are over I may be fit to go back with her. But I do hope I may be able to copy a bit of that picture first, though, any way, I can never forget it.’

‘To go on as before?’ exclaimed Gillian, with an interrogative sigh of wonder.

‘If that notice of dismissal can be revoked,’ said Kalliope.

‘But would you like it—must you?’

‘I *should* like to go back to my girls,’ said Kalliope; ‘and things come into my head, now I am doing nothing, that I want to work out, if I might. So, you see, it is not at all a pity that I *must*.’

‘And why is it must?’ said Gillian wistfully. ‘You have to get well first.’

‘Yes, I know that; but, you see, there are Maura and Petros. They must not be thrown on Alexis, poor dear fellow! And if he could only be set free, he might go on with what he once hoped for, though he thinks it is his duty to give all that entirely up now and work obediently on. But I know the longing will revive, and if I only could improve myself, and be worth more, it might still be possible.’

‘Only you must not begin too soon and work yourself to death.’

‘Hardly after such a rest,’ said Kalliope. ‘It is not work I mind, but worry’—and then a sadder look crossed her for a moment, and she added, ‘I am so thankful.’

‘Thankful!’ echoed Gillian.

‘Yes, indeed! For Sir Jasper’s coming and saving us at that dreadful moment, and my being able to keep up as long as dear mamma wanted me; and then Mrs.

Halfpenny being spared by dear Lady Merrifield to give me such wonderful care and kindness, and little Theodore being so happily placed, and this rest—such a strange quiet rest as I never knew before. Oh! it is all so thankworthy’—and the great tears came to dim her eyes. ‘It seems sent to help me to take strength and courage for the future. “He hath helped me hitherto.”’

‘And you are better?’

‘Yes, much better. Quite comfortable as long as I am quite still.’

‘And content to be still?’

‘Yes, I’m very lazy.’

It was a tired voice, and Gillian feared her half-hour was nearly over, but she could not help saying—

‘Do you know, I think it will be all nicer now. Mr. White is doing so much, and Mr. Stebbing hates it so, that Mrs. Stebbing says he is going to dissolve the partnership and go away.’

‘Then it would all be easier. It seems too good to be true.’

‘And that man Mr. White. He must do something for you! He ought.’

‘Oh no! He has done a great deal already, and has not been well used. Don’t talk of that.’

‘I believe he is awfully rich. You know he is building an Institute for the workmen, and a whole row of model cottages.’

‘Yes, Alexis told me. What a difference it will

make! I hope he will build a room where the girls can dine and rest and read, or have a piano; it would be so good for them.'

'You had better talk to him about it.'

'I never see him, and I should not dare.'

'I'll tell my aunts. He always does what Aunt Ada tells him. Is that really all you wish?'

'Oh! I don't wish for anything much—I don't seem able to care now dear mamma is where they cease from troubling, and I have Alec again.'

'Well, I can't help having great hopes. I can't see why that man should not make a daughter of you! Then you would travel and see mountains and pictures and everything. Oh, should you not like that?'

'Like? Oh, one does not think about liking things impossible! And for the rest, it is nonsense. I should not like to be dependent, and I ought not.'

'You don't think what is to come next?'

'No; it would be taking thought for the morrow, would it not? I don't want to, while I can't do anything; it would only make me fret, and I am glad I am too stupid still to begin vexing myself over it. I suppose energy and power of considering will come when my heart does not flutter so. In the meantime, I only want to keep quiet, and I hope that's not all laziness, but *some* trust in Him who has helped me all this time.'

'Miss Gillian, you've clavered as long as is good for Miss White, and here are the whole clanjamfrie

waiting in the road for you. Now be douce, my bairn, and mind you are not in the woods at home, and don't let the laddies play their tricks with Miss Primrose.'

'I must go,' said Gillian, hastily kissing Kalliope. 'The others were going to call for me. When Lady Phyllis was riding with her father she spied a wonderful field of daffodils and a valley full of moss at a place called Clipston, two miles off, and we are all going to get some for the decorations. I'll send you some. Good-bye.'

The clanjamfrie, as Mrs. Halfpenny called it, mustered strong, and Gillian's heart leapt at the resumption of the tumultuous family life, as she beheld the collection of girls, boys, dogs, and donkeys awaiting her in the approach; and, in spite of the two governesses' presence, her mind misgave her as to the likelihood of regard to the hint that her mother had given that she hoped the elder ones would try to be sober in their ways, and not quite forget what week it was. It was in their favour that Jasper, now in his last term at school, was much more of a man and less of a boy than hitherto, and was likely to be on the side of discretion, so that he might keep in order that alway difficult element, Wilfred, whose two years of preparatory school as yet made him only more ingenious in the arts of teasing, and more determined to show his superiority to petticoat government. He had driven Fergus nearly distracted by threatening to use all his mineralogical specimens to make ducks and drakes, and actually con-

fusing them together, so that Fergus repented of having exhibited them, and rejoiced that Aunt Jane had let them continue in her lumber-room till they could find a permanent home.

Wilfred had a shot for Mrs. Halfpenny, when she came down with Gillian and looked for Primrose to secure that there were no interstices between the silk handkerchief and fur collar.

‘Ha, ha, old Small Change, don’t you wish you may get it?’—as Primrose proved to be outside the drive on one of the donkeys. ‘You’ve got nothing to do but gnaw your fists at us like old Giant Pope.’

‘For shame, Wilfred!’ said Jasper. ‘My mother did Primrose’s throat, nurse, so she is all right.’

‘Bad form,’ observed Lord Ivinghoe, shaking his head.

‘I’m not going to Eton,’ replied Wilfred audaciously.

‘I should hope not!’—in a tone of ineffable contempt, not for Wilfred’s person, but his manners, and therewith his Lordship exclaimed ‘Who’s that?’ as Maura came flying down with Gillian’s forgotten basket.

‘Oh, that’s Maura White!’ said Valetta.

‘I say, isn’t she going with us?’

‘Oh no, she has to look after her sister!’

‘Don’t you think we might take her, Gill?’ said Fly. ‘She never gets any fun.’

‘I don’t think she ought to leave Kalliope to-day, Fly, for nurse is going down to Il Lido; and besides,

Aunt Jane said we must not take *all* Rockquay with us.'

'No; they would not let us ask Kitty and Clement Varley,' said Fergus disconsolately.

'I am sure she is five times as pretty as your Kitty!' returned Ivinghoe. 'She is a regular stunner.' Whereby it may be perceived that a year at Eton had considerably modified his Lordship's correctness of speech, if not of demeanour.

Be it further observed that, in spite of the escort of the governesses, the young people were as free as if those ladies had been absent, for, as Jasper observed, the donkeys neutralised them. Miss Elbury, being a bad walker, rode one, and Miss Vincent felt bound to keep close to Primrose upon the other; and as neither animal could be prevailed on to moderate its pace, they kept far ahead of all except Valetta, who was mounted on the pony intended for Lady Phyllis, but disdained by her until she should be tired. Lord Ivinghoe's admiration of Maura was received contemptuously by Wilfred, who was half a year younger than his cousin, and being already, in his own estimation, a Wykehamist, had endless rivalries with him.

'She! She's nothing but a cad! Her sister is a shop-girl, and her brother is a quarryman.'

'She does not look like it,' observed Ivinghoe, while Mysie and Fly, with one voice, exclaimed that her father was an officer in the Royal Wardours.

'A private first,' said Wilfred, with boyhood's re-

iteration. 'Cads and quarrymen all of them—the whole boiling, old White and all, though he has got such a stuck-up house!'

'Nonsense, Will,' said Fly. 'Why, Mr. White has dined with us.'

'A patent of nobility,' said Jasper, smiling.

'I don't care,' said Wilfred; 'if other people choose to chum with old stonemasons and convicts, I don't.'

'Wilfred, that is too bad,' said Gillian. 'It is very wrong to talk in that way.'

'Oh!' said the audacious Wilfred, 'we all know who is Gill's Jack!'

'Shut up, Will!' cried Fergus, flying at him. 'I told you not to——'

But Wilfred bounded up a steep bank, and from that place of vantage went on—

'Didn't she teach him Greek, and wasn't he spoony; and didn't she send back his valentine, so that——'

Fergus was scrambling up the bank after him, enraged at the betrayal of his confidence, and shouting inarticulately, while poor Gillian moved on, overwhelmed with confusion, and Fly uttered the cutting words, 'Perfectly disgusting!'

'Ay, so it was!' cried the unabashed Wilfred, keeping on at the top of the bank, and shaking the bushes at every pause. 'So he broke down the rocks, and ran away with the tin, and enlisted, and went to prison. Such a sweet young man for Gill!'

Poor Gillian! was her punishment never to end?

That scrape of hers, hitherto so tenderly and delicately hinted at, and which she would have given worlds to have kept from her brothers, now shouted all over the country! Sympathy, however, she had, if that would do her any good. Mysie and Fly came on each side of Ivinghoe, assuring him, in low eager voices, of the utter nonsense of the charge, and explaining ardently; and Jasper, with one bound, laid hold of the tormentor, dragged him down, and, holding his stick over him, said—

‘Now, Wilfred, if you don’t hold your tongue, and not behave like a brute, I shall send you straight home.’

‘It’s quite true,’ growled Wilfred. ‘Ask her.’

‘What does that signify? I’m ashamed of you! I’ve a great mind to thrash you this instant. If you speak another word of that sort, I shall. Now then, there are the governesses trying to stop to see what’s the row. I shall give you up to Miss Vincent, if you choose to behave so like a spiteful girl.’

A sixth-form youth was far too great a man to be withstood by one who was not yet a public schoolboy at all; and Wilfred actually obeyed, while Jasper added to Fergus—

‘How could you be such a little ass as to go and tell him all that rot?’

‘It was true,’ grumbled Fergus.

‘The more reason not to go cackling about it like an old hen, or a girl! Your own sister! I’m ashamed

of you both. Mind, I shall thrash you if you mention it again.'

Poor Fergus felt the accusation of cackling unjust, since he had only told Wilfred in confidence, and that had been betrayed; but he had got his lesson on family honour, and he subsided into his wonted look-out for curious stones, while Gillian was overtaken by Jasper—whether willingly or not, she hardly knew—but his first word was, 'Little beast!'

'You didn't hurt him, I hope,' said Gill, accepting the invitation to take his arm.

'Oh no! I only threatened to make him walk with the governesses and the donkeys.'

'Asses and savants to the centre,' said Gillian; 'like the orders to the French army in Egypt.'

'But what's all this about? You wanted me to look after you! Is it that Alexis?'

'Oh, Japs! Mamma knows all about it and papa. It was only that he was ridiculous because I was so silly as to think I could help him with his Greek.'

'You! With his Greek! I pity him!'

'Yes. I found he soon knew too much for me,' said Gillian meekly; 'but, indeed, Japs, it wasn't very bad! He only sent me a valentine, and Aunt Jane says I need not have been so angry.'

'A cat may look at a king,' said Jasper loftily. 'It is a horrid bad thing for a girl to be left to herself without a brother worth having.'

So Gillian got off pretty easily, and after all the

walk was not greatly spoilt. They coalesced again with the other three, who were tolerably discreet, and found the debate on the White gentility had been resumed. Ivinghoe was philosophically declaring 'that in these days one must take up with everybody, so it did not matter if one was a little more of a cad than another; he himself was fag at Eton to a fellow whose father was an oilman, and who wasn't half a bad lot.'

'An oilman, Ivy,' said his sister; 'I thought he imported petroleum.'

'Well, it's all the same. I believe he began as an oilman.'

'We shall have Fergus reporting that he's a petroleuse,' put in Jasper.

'No, a petroleuse is a woman.'

'I like Mr. White,' said Fly; 'but, Gillian, you don't think it is true that he is going to marry your Aunt Jane?'

There was a great groan, and Japs observed—

'Some one told us Rockquay was a hotbed of gossip, and we seem to have got it strong.'

'Where did this choice specimen come from, Fly?' demanded Ivinghoe, in his manner most like his mother.

Fly nodded her head towards her governess in the advanced guard.

'She had a cousin to tea with her, and they thought I didn't know whom they meant, and they said that he was always up at Rockstone.'

‘Well, he is; and Aunt Jane always stands up for him,’ said Gillian; ‘but that was because he is so good to the workpeople, and Aunt Ada took him for some grand political friend of Cousin Rotherwood’s.’

‘Aunt Jane!’ said Jasper. ‘Why, she is the very essence and epitome of old maids.’

‘Yes,’ said Gillian. ‘If it came to that, she would quite as soon marry the postman.’

‘That’s lucky,’ said Ivinghoe. ‘One can swallow a good deal, but not quite one’s own connections.’

‘In fact,’ said Jasper, ‘you had rather be an oilman’s fag than a quarryman’s—what is it?—first cousin once removed in law?’

‘It is much more likely,’ said Gillian, as they laughed over this, ‘that Kalliope and Maura will be his adopted daughters, only he never comes near them.’

Wherewith there was a halt. Miss Elbury insisted that Phyllis should ride, the banks began to show promise of flowers, and, in the search for violets, dangerous topics were forgotten, and Wilfred was forgiven. They reached the spot marked by Fly, a field with a border of sloping broken ground and brushwood, which certainly fulfilled all their desires, steeply descending to a stream full of rocks, the ground white with wood anemones, long evergreen trails of periwinkles and blue flowers between, primroses clustering under the roots of the trees, daffodils gilding the grass above, and the banks verdant with exquisite feather-moss. Such a spring-tide wood was joy to all, especi-

ally as the first cuckoo of the season came to add to their delights and set them counting for the augury of happy years, which proved so many that Mysie said they would not know what to do with them.

‘I should,’ said Ivinghoe. ‘I should like to live to be a great old statesman, as Lord Palmerston did, and have it all my own way. Wouldn’t I bring things round again!’

‘Perhaps they would have gone too far,’ suggested Jasper; ‘and then you would have to gnaw your hand like Giant Pope, as Wilfred says.’

‘Catch me, while I could do something better.’

‘If one only lived long enough,’ speculated Fergus, ‘one might find out what everything was made of, and how to do everything.’

‘I wonder if the people did before the Flood, when they lived eight or nine hundred years,’ said Fly.

‘Perhaps that is the reason there is nothing new under the sun,’ suggested Valetta, as many a child has before suggested.

‘But then,’ said Mysie, ‘they got wicked.’

‘And then after the Flood it had all to be begun over again,’ said Ivinghoe. ‘Let me see, Methuselah lived about as long as from William the Conqueror till now. I think he might have got to steam and electricity.’

‘And dynamite,’ said Gillian. ‘Oh, I don’t wonder they had to be swept away, if they were clever and wicked both!’

‘And I suppose they were,’ said Jasper. ‘At least the giants, and that they handed on some of their ability through Ham, to the Egyptians, and all those queer primeval coons, whose works we are digging up.’

‘From the Conquest till now,’ repeated Gillian. ‘I’m glad we don’t live so long now. It tires one to think of it.’

‘But we shall,’ said Fly.

‘Yes,’ said Mysie; ‘but then we shall be rid of this nasty old self that is always getting wrong.’

‘That little lady’s nasty old self does so as little as any one’s,’ Jasper could not help remarking to his sister; and Fly, pouncing on the first purple orchis spike amid its black-spotted leaves, cried—

‘At any rate, these dear things go on the same, without any tiresome inventing.’

‘Except God’s just at first,’ whispered Mysie.

‘And the gardeners do invent new ones,’ said Valetta.

‘Invent! No; they only fuss them and spoil them, and make ridiculous names for them,’ said Fly. ‘These darling creatures are ever so much better. Look at Primrose there.’

‘Yes,’ said Gillian, as she saw her little sister in quiet ecstasy over the sparkling bells of the daffodils; ‘one would not like to live eight hundred years away from that experience.’

‘But mamma cares just as much still as Primrose

does,' said Mysie. 'We must get some for her own self as well as for 'the church.'

'Mine are all for mamma,' proclaimed Primrose; and just then there was a shout that a bird's nest had been found—a ring-ousel's nest on the banks. Fly and her brother shared a collection of birds' eggs, and were so excited about robbing the ousels of a single egg, that Gillian hoped that Fergus would not catch the infection and abandon minerals for eggs, which would be ever so much worse—only a degree better than butterflies, towards which Wilfred showed a certain proclivity.

'I shall be thirteen before next holidays,' he observed, after making a vain dash with his hat at a sulphur butterfly, looking like a primrose flying away.

'Mamma won't allow any *killing collection* before thirteen years old,' explained Mysie.

'She says,' explained Gillian, 'by that time one ought to be old enough to discriminate between the lawfulness of killing the creatures for the sake of studying their beauty and learning them, and the mere wanton amusement of hunting them down under the excuse of collecting.'

'I say,' exclaimed Valetta, who had been exploring above, 'here is such a funny old house.'

There was a rush in that direction, and at the other end of the wide home-field was perceived a picturesque gray stone house, with large mullioned windows, a dilapidated low stone wall, with what had once been

a handsome gateway, overgrown with ivy, and within big double daffodils and white narcissus growing wild.

‘It’s like the halls of Ivor,’ said Mysie, awestruck by the loneliness; ‘no dog, nor horse, nor cow, not even a goose.’

‘And what a place to sketch!’ cried Miss Vincent. ‘Oh, Gillian, we must come here another day.’

‘Oh, may we gather the flowers?’ exclaimed the insatiable Primrose.

‘Those poetic narcissuses would be delicious for the choir screen,’ added Gillian.

‘Poetic narcissus—poetic grandmother,’ said Wilfred. ‘It’s old butter and eggs.’

‘I say!’ cried Mysie. ‘Look, Ivy—I know that pair of fighting lions—ain’t these some of your arms over the door?’

‘By which you mean a quartering of our shield,’ said Ivinghoe. ‘Of course it is the Clipp bearing. Or, two lions azure, regardant combatant, their tails coupéd.’

‘Two blue Kilkenny cats, who have begun with each other’s tails,’ commented Jasper.

Ivinghoe glared a little, but respected the sixth form, and Gillian added—

‘They clipped them! Then did this place belong to our ancestors?’

‘Poetic grandmother, really!’ said Mysie.

‘Great grandmother,’ corrected Ivinghoe. ‘To be

sure. It was from the Clipps that we got all this Rockstone estate !'

'And I suppose this was their house ? What a shame to have deserted it !'

'Oh, it has been a farmhouse,' said Fly. 'I heard something about farms that wouldn't let.'

'Then is it yours ?' cried Valetta, 'and may we gather the flowers ?'

'And mayn't we explore ?' asked Mysie. 'Oh, what fun !'

'Holloa !' exclaimed Wilfred, transfixed, as if he had seen the ghosts of all the Clipps. For just as Valetta and Mysie threw themselves on the big bunches of hepatica and the white narcissus, a roar, worthy of the clip-tailed lions, proceeded from the window, and the demand, 'Who is picking *my* roses ?'

Primrose in terror threw herself on Gillian with a little scream. Wilfred crept behind the walls, but after the general start there was an equally universal laugh, for between the stout mullions of the oriel window Lord Rotherwood's face was seen, and Sir Jasper's behind him.

Great was the jubilation, and there was a rush to the tall door, up the dilapidated steps, where curls of fern were peeping out ; but the gentlemen called out that only the back-door could be opened, and the intention of a 'real grand exploration' was cut short by Miss Elbury's declaring that she was bound not to let Phyllis stay out till six o'clock.

Fly, in her usual good-humoured way, suppressed her sighs and begged the others to explore without her, but the general vote declared this to be out of the question. Fly had too short a time to remain with her cousins to be forsaken even for the charms of 'the halls of Ivor,' or the rival Beast's Castle, as Gillian called it, which, after all, would not run away.

'But it might be let,' said Mysie.

'Yes; I've got a tenant in agitation,' said Lord Rotherwood mischievously. 'Never mind, I dare say he won't inquire what you have done with his butter and eggs.'

So with a parting salute to the ancestral halls, the cavalry was set in order, big panniers full of moss and flowers disposed on the donkeys, Fly placed on her pony, and every maiden taking her basket of flowers, Jasper and Ivinghoe alone being amiable, or perhaps trustworthy enough to assist in carrying. Fly's pony demurred to the extra burthen, so Jasper took hers; and when Gillian declared herself too fond of her flowers to part with them, Ivinghoe astonished Miss Vincent, on whom some stones of Fergus's, as well as her own share of flowers, had been bestowed, by taking one handle of her most cumbrous basket.

Sir Jasper and Lord Rotherwood rode together through the happy young troop on the homeward way. Perhaps Ivinghoe was conscious of a special nod of approval from his father.

On passing Rock House, the youthful public was rather amused at his pausing, and saying—

‘Aren’t you going to leave some flowers there?’

‘Oh yes!’ said Gillian. ‘I have a basket on purpose.’

‘And I have some for Maura,’ said Valetta.

Valetta’s was an untidy bunch; Gillian’s a dainty basket, where white violets reposed on moss within a circle of larger blossoms.

‘That’s something like!’ quoth Ivinghoe.

He lingered with them as if he wanted to see that vision again; but only the caretaker appeared, and promised to take the flowers upstairs.

Maura afterwards told how they were enjoyed, and they knew of Kalliope’s calm restfulness in Holy Week thoughts and Paschal joys.

It was on Easter Tuesday that Mr. White first sent a message asking to see his guest, now of nearly three weeks.

He came in very quietly and gently—perhaps the sight of the room he had prepared for his young wife was in itself a shock to him, and he had lived so long without womankind that he had all a lonely man’s awe of an invalid. He took with a certain respect the hand that Kalliope held out, as she said, with a faint flush in her cheeks—

‘I am glad to thank you, sir. You have been very good to me.’

‘I am glad to see you better,’ he said, with a little embarrassment.

‘I ought to be, in this beautiful air, and with these lovely things to look at,’ and she pointed to the reigning photograph on the stand—the façade of St. Mark’s.

‘You should see it as I did.’ And he began to describe it to her, she putting in a question or two here and there, which showed her appreciation.

‘You know something about it already,’ he said.

‘Yes; when I was quite a little girl one of the officers in the Royal Wardours brought some photographs to Malta, and told me about them.’

‘But,’ he said, recalling himself, ‘that is not my object now. Your brother says he does not feel competent to decide without you.’ And he laid before her two or three prospectuses of grammar schools. ‘It is time to apply,’ he added, ‘if that little fellow—Peter, you call him, don’t you?—is to begin next term.’

‘Petros! Oh, sir, this is kindness!’

‘I desired that the children’s education should be attended to,’ said Mr. White. ‘I did not intend their being sent to an ordinary National school.’

‘Indeed,’ said Kalliope; ‘I do not think much time has been lost, for they have learnt a good deal there; but I am particularly glad that Petros should go to a superior school just now that he has been left alone, for he is more lively and sociable than Theodore, and it might be less easy for him to keep from bad companions.’

The pros and cons of the several schools were discussed, and Hurstpierpoint finally fixed on.

‘Never mind about his outfit,’ added Mr. White. ‘I’ll give that fellow down in Bellevue an order to rig him out. He is a sharp little sturdy fellow, who will make his way in the world.’

‘Indeed, I trust so, now that his education is secured. It is another load off my mind,’ said Kalliope, with a smile of exceeding sweetness and gratitude, her hands clasped, and her eyes raised for a moment in higher thankfulness,—a look that so enhanced her beauty that Mr. White gazed for a moment in wonder. The next moment, however, the dark eyes turned on him with a little anxiety, and she said—

‘One thing more, sir. Perhaps you will be so kind as to relieve my mind again. That notice of dismissal at the quarter’s end. Was it not in some degree from a mistake?’

‘An utter mistake, my dear,’ he said hastily. ‘Never trouble your head about it.’

‘Then it does not hold?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘And I may go back to my office as soon as I am well enough?’

‘Is that your wish?’

‘Yes, sir. I love my work and my assistants, and I think I could do better if a little more scope could be allowed me.’

‘Very well, we will see about that—you have to get well first of all.’

‘I am so much better that I ought to go home. Mr. Lee is quite ready for me.’

‘Nonsense! You must be much stronger before Dagger would hear of your going.’

After this Mr. White came to sit with Kalliope for a time in the course of each day, bringing with him something that would interest her, and seeming gratified by her responsiveness, quiet as it was, for she was still very feeble, and exertion caused a failure of breath and fluttering of heart that were so distressing that ten days more passed before she was brought downstairs and drawn out in the garden in a chair, where she could sit on the sheltered terrace enjoying the delicious spring air and soft sea-breezes, sometimes alone, sometimes with the company of one friend or another. Gillian and Aunt Jane had, with the full connivance of Mr. White, arranged a temporary entrance from one garden to the other for the convenience of attending to Kalliope, and here one afternoon Miss Mohun was coming in when she heard through the laurels two voices speaking to the girl. As she moved forward she saw they were the elder and younger Stebbings, and that Kalliope had risen to her feet, and was leaning on the back of her chair. While she was considering whether to advance Kalliope heard her, and called in a breathless voice, ‘Miss Mohun! Oh, Miss Mohun, come!’

‘Miss Mohun! You will do us the justice——’ began Mr. Stebbing, speaking more to her indignant face and gesture than to any words.

‘Miss White is not well,’ she said. ‘You had better leave her to me.’

And as they withdrew through the house, Kalliope sank back in her chair in one of those alarming attacks of deadly faintness that had been averted for many days past. Happily an electric bell was always at hand, and the housekeeper knew what remedies to bring. Kalliope did not attempt a word for many long minutes, though the colour came back gradually to her lips. Her first words were, ‘Thank you! Oh, I did hope that persecution was over!’

‘My poor child! Don’t tell me unless you like! Only—it wasn’t about your work?’

‘Oh no, the old story! But he brought his father—to say he consented—and wished it—now.’

There was no letting her say any more at that time, but it was all plain enough. This had been one more attempt of the Stebbing family to recover their former power; Kalliope was assumed to be Mr. White’s favoured niece; Frank could make capital of having loved her when poor and neglected; and his parents were ready to back his suit. The father and son had used their familiarity with the house to obtain admittance to the garden without announcement or preparation, and had pressed the siege, with a confidence that could only be inspired by their own self-opinion.

Kalliope had been kept up by her native dignity and resolution, and had at first gently, then firmly, declined the arguments, persuasions, promises, and final reproaches with which they beset her—even threatening to disclose what they called encouragement, and assuring her that she need not reckon on Mr. White, for the general voice declared him likely to marry again, and then where would she be?

‘I don’t know what would have become of me, if you had not come,’ she said.

And when she had rested long enough, and crept into the house, and Alexis had come home to carry her upstairs, it was plain that she had been seriously thrown back, and she was not able to leave her room for two or three days.

Mr. White was necessarily told what had been the cause of the mischief. He smiled grimly. ‘Ay! ay! Master Frank thought he would come round the old man, did he? He will find himself out. Ha, ha! a girl like that in the house is like a honey-pot near a wasps’ nest, and the little sister will be as bad. Didn’t I see the young lord, smart little prig as he looks, holding an umbrella over her with a smile on his face, as much as to say, “I know who is a pretty girl! No one to look after them either!” But maybe they will all find themselves mistaken,’ and his grim smile relaxed into a highly amiable one.

Miss Mohun was not at all uneasy as to the young lord. An Eton boy’s admiration of a pretty face did

not amount to much, even if Ivinghoe had not understood '*Noblesse oblige*' too well to leave a young girl unsheltered. Besides, he and all the rest were going away the next day. But what did that final hint mean?

CHAPTER XXII

THE MAIDEN ALL FORLORN

ONE secret was soon out, even before the cruel parting of Fly and Mysie, which it greatly mitigated.

Clipston was to be repaired and put in order, to be rented by the Merrifields. It was really a fine old substantial squire's house, though neglected and consigned to farmers for four generations. It had great capabilities—a hall up to the roof, wainscoted rooms—at present happy hunting-grounds to boys and terriers—a choked fountain, numerous windows, walled up in the days of the 'tax on light,' and never reopened, and, moreover, a big stone barn, with a cross on the gable, and evident traces of having once been a chapel.

The place was actually in Rockstone Parish, and had a hamlet of six or seven houses, for which cottage services were held once a week; but the restoration of the chapel would provide a place for these, and it would become a province for Lady Merrifield's care, while Sir Jasper was absolutely entreated, both by Lord Rotherwood and the rector of Rockstone, to

become the valuable layman of the parish ; nor was he at all unwilling thus to bestow his enforced leisure.

It was a beautiful place. The valley of daffodils already visited narrowed into a ravine, where the rivulet rushed down from moorlands, through a ravine charmingly wooded, and interspersed with rock. It would give country delights to the children, and remove them from the gossip of the watering-place society, and yet not be too far off for those reading-room opportunities beloved of gentlemen.

The young people were in ecstasies, only mourning that they could not live there during the repairs, and that those experienced in the nature of workmen hesitated to promise that Clipston would be habitable by the summer vacation. In the meantime, most of the movables from Silverfold were transported thither, and there was a great deal of walking and driving to and fro, planning for the future, and revelling in the spring outburst of flowers.

Schoolroom work had begun again, and Lady Merrifield was hearing Mysie read the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, while Miss Vincent superintended Primrose's copies, and Gillian's chalks were striving to portray a bust of Sophocles, when the distant sounds of the piano in the drawing-room stopped, and Valetta came in with words always ominous—

‘ Aunt Jane wants to speak to you, mamma.’

Lady Merrifield gathered up her work and departed,

while Valetta, addressing the public, said, 'Something's up.'

'Oh!' cried Primrose, 'Sofi hasn't run away again?'

'I hope Kalliope isn't worse,' said Mysie anxiously.

'I guess,' said Valetta, 'somebody said something the other day!'

'Something proving us the hot-beds of gossip,' muttered Gillian.

'You had better get your German exercise, Valetta,' said Miss Vincent. 'Mysie, you have not finished your sums.'

And a sigh went round; but Valetta added one after-clap.

'Aunt Jane looked—I don't know how!'

Whereat Gillian nodded her head, and looked up at Miss Vincent, who was as curious as the rest, but restrained the manifestation manfully.

Meantime, Lady Merrifield found her sister standing at the window, and, without turning round, the words were uttered—

'Jasper was right, Lily.'

'You don't mean it?'

'Yes; he is after her!'—with a long breath.

'Mr. White!'

'Yes'—then sitting down. 'I did not think much of it before. They always are after Ada more or less—and she likes it; but it never has come to anything.'

'Why should it now?'

'It has! At least, it has gone further than ever

anything did before, except Charlie Scott, that ridiculous boy at Beechcroft that William was so angry with, and who married somebody else.'

'You don't say that he has proposed to her?'

'Yes, he has—the man! By a letter this morning, and I could see she expected it—not that that's any wonder!'

'But, my dear, she can't possibly be thinking of it.'

'Well, I should have said it was impossible; but I see she has not made up her mind. Poor dear Ada! It is too bad to laugh; but she does like the having a real offer at last, and a great Italian castle laid at her feet.'

'But he isn't a gentleman! I don't mean only his birth—and I know he is a good man really—but Jasper said he could feel he was not a gentleman by the way he fell on Richard White before his sister.'

'I know! I know! I wonder if it would be for her happiness?'

'Then she has not answered him?'

'No; or, rather, I left her going to write. She won't accept him certainly now; but I believe she is telling him that she must have time to consider and consult her family.'

'She must know pretty well what her family will say. Fancy William! Fancy Emily! Fancy Reginald!'

'Yes, oh yes! But Ada—I must say it—she does like to prolong the situation.'

‘It is not fair on the poor man.’

‘Well, she will act as she chooses ; but I think she really does want to see what amount of opposition—— No, not that, but of estrangement it would cause.’

‘Did you see the letter?’

‘Yes ; no doubt you will too. I told her I should come to you, and she did not object. I think she was glad to be saved broaching the subject, for she is half ashamed.’

‘I should have thought she would have been as deeply offended at the presumption as poor Gillian was with the valentine.’

‘Lily, my dear, forty-two is not all one with seventeen, especially when there’s an estate with an Italian countship attached to it ! Though I’m sure I’d rather marry Alexis than this man. *He is* a gentleman in grain !’

‘Oh, Jenny, you are very severe !’

‘I’m afraid it is bitterness, Lily ; so I rushed down to have it all out with you, and make up my mind what part to take.’

‘It is very hard on you, my dear, after you have nursed and waited on her all these years.’

‘It is the little titillation of vanity——exactly like the Ada of sixteen, nay, of six, that worries me, and makes me naughty,’ said Jane, dashing off a tear. ‘Oh, Lily ! how could I have borne it if you had not come home?’

‘But what do you mean about the part to take?’

‘Well, you see, Lily, I really do not know what I ought to do. I want to clear my mind by talking to you.’

‘I am afraid it would make a great difference to you in the matter of means.’

‘I don’t mean about that; but I am not sure whether I ought to stand up for her. You see the man is really good at heart, and religious, and he is taking out this chaplain. The climate, mountains, and sea might really suit her health, and she could have all kinds of comforts and luxuries; and if she can get over his birth, and the want of fine edge of his manners, I don’t know that we have any right to set ourselves against it.’

‘I should have thought those objections would have weighed most of all with her.’

‘And I do believe that if the whole family are unanimous in scouting the very idea, she will give it up. She *is* proud of Mohun blood, and the Rotherwood connection and all, and if there were a desperate opposition—well, she would be rather flattered, and give in; but I am not sure that she would not always regret it, and pine after what she might have had.’

‘Rotherwood likes the man.’

‘Like—but that’s not liking him to marry his cousin.’

‘Rotherwood will not be the person most shocked.’

‘No. We shall have a terrible time, however it ends. Oh, I wish it was all over!’

‘Do you think she really cares for the man—loves him, in fact?’

‘My dear Lily, if Ada ever was in love with anybody, it was with Harry May, and that was all pure mistake. I never told anybody, but I believe it was that which upset her health. But they are both too old to concern themselves about such trifles. He does not expect it!’

‘I have seen good strong love in a woman over forty.’

‘Yes; but this is quite another thing. A lady of the house wanted! That’s the motive. I should not wonder if he came home as much to look for a lady-wife as to set the Stebbings to rights; or, if not, he is driven to it by having the Whites on his hands.’

‘I don’t quite see that. I was going to ask you how it would affect them.’

‘Well, you see, though she is perfectly willing and anxious to begin again, poor dear Kally really can’t. She did try to arrange a design that had been running in her head for a long time, and she was so bad after it that Dr. Dagger said she must not attempt it. Then, though she is discreet enough for anything, Mr. White is not really her uncle, and could not take her about with him alone or even with Maura; so I gather from some expressions in his letter that he would like to take her out with them, spend the summer at Rocca Marina, and let her have a winter’s study at Florence.

Then, I suppose she might come back and superintend on quite a different footing.'

'So he wants Ada as a chaperon for Kalliope?'

'That is an element in the affair, and not a bad one, and I don't think Ada will object. She won't be left entirely to his companionship.'

'My dear Jane! Then I'm sure she ought not to marry him!' cried Lady Merrifield indignantly. 'Here comes Jasper. May I tell him?'

'You will, whether you may or not.'

And what Sir Jasper said was—

“‘Who married the maiden all forlorn—’”

At which both sisters, though rather angry, could not help laughing, and Lady Merrifield explained that they had always said the events had gone on in a concatenation, like the house that Jack built, from Gillian's peep through the rails. However, he was of opinion that it was better not to make a strenuous opposition.

'Adeline is quite old enough to judge for herself whether the incongruities will interfere with her happiness,' he said; 'and this is really a worthy man who ought not to be contemned. Violent contradiction might leave memories that would make it difficult to be on affectionate terms afterwards.'

'Yes,' said Jane; 'that is what I feel. Thank you, Jasper. Now I must go to my district. Happily those things run on all the same for the present.'

But when she was gone Sir Jasper told his wife that he thought it ought to be seriously put before Adeline that Jane ought to be considered. She had devoted herself to the care of her sister for many years, and the division of their means would tell seriously upon her comfort.

‘If it were a matter of affection, there would be nothing to say,’ he observed; ‘but nobody pretends that it is so, and surely Jane deserves consideration.’

‘I should think her a much more comfortable companion than Mr. White,’ said Lady Merrifield. ‘I can’t believe it will come to anything. Whatever the riches or the castle at Rocca Marina may be, Ada would, in a worldly point of view, give up a position of some consideration here, and I think that will weigh with her.’

As soon as possible, Lady Merrifield went up to see her sister, and found her writing letters in a great flutter of importance. It was quite plain that the affair was not to be quashed at once, and that, whether the suit were granted or not, all the family were to be aware that Adeline had had her choice. Warned by her husband, Lady Merrifield guarded the form of her remonstrances.

‘Oh yes, dear Lily, I know! It *is* a sacrifice in many points of view; but think what a field is open to me! There are all those English workmen and their wives and families living out there, and Mr. White does so need a lady to influence them.’

‘You have not done much work of that kind. Besides, I thought this chaplain was married.’

‘Yes; but the moral support of a lady at the head must be needful,’ said Ada. ‘It is quite a work.’

‘Perhaps so,’ said her sister, who had scarcely been in the habit of looking on Ada as a great moral influence. ‘But have you thought what this will be to Jane?’

‘Really, Lily, it is a good deal for Jane’s sake. She will be so much more free without being bound to poor me!’—and Ada’s head went on one side. ‘You know she would never have lived here but for me; and now she will be able to do what she pleases.’

‘Not pecuniarily.’

‘Oh, it will be quite possible to see to all that! Besides, think of the advantage to her schemes. Oh yes, dear Jenny, it will be a wrench to her, of course, and she will miss me; but, when that is once got over, she will feel that I have acted for the best. Nor will it be such a separation; he means always to spend the summer here, and the winter and spring at Florence or Rocca Marina.’ It was grand to hear the Italian syllables roll from Adeline’s tongue. ‘You know he could take the title if he pleased.’

‘I am sure I hope he will not do anything so ridiculous!’

‘Oh no, of course not!’ But it was plain that the secret consciousness of being Countess of Rocca Marina was an offset against being plain Mrs. White, and

Adeline continued: 'There is another thing—I do not quite see how it can be managed about Kalliope otherwise, poor girl!'

It was quite true that the care of Kalliope would be greatly facilitated by Mr. White's marriage; but what was absurd was to suppose that Ada would have made any sacrifice for her sake, or any one else's, and there was something comical as well as provoking in this pose of devotion to the public good.

'You are decided, then?'

'Oh no! I am only showing you what inducements there are to give up so much as I should do here—if I make up my mind to it.'

'There's only one inducement, I should think, valid for a moment.'

'Yes'—bridling a little. 'But, Lily, you always had your romance. We don't all meet with a Jasper at the right moment; and—and'—the Maid of Athens drooped her eyelids, and ingenuously curved her lips. 'I do think the poor man has it very much at heart.'

'Then you ought not to keep him in suspense.'

'And you—you really are not against it, Lily?' (rather in a disappointed tone), as if she expected to have her own value enhanced.

'I think you ought to do whatever is most right and just by him, and everybody else. If you really care for the man enough to overlook his origin, and his occasional betrayals of it, and think he will make you better and happier, take him at once; but don't

pretend to call it a sacrifice, or for anybody's sake but for your own; and, any way, don't trifle with him and his suspense.'

Lady Merrifield spoke with unwonted severity, for she was really provoked.

'But, Lily, I must see what the others say—William and Emily. I told him that William was the head of our family.'

'If you mean to be guided by them, well and good; if not, I see no sense in asking them.'

After all, the family commotion fell short of what was expected by either of the sisters. The eldest brother, Mr. Mohun, of Beechcroft Court, wrote to the lady herself that she was quite old enough to know what was for her own happiness, and he had no desire to interfere with her choice if she preferred wealth to station. To Lady Merrifield his letter began: 'It is very well it is no worse, and as Jasper vouches for this being a worthy man, and of substantial means, there is no valid objection. I shall take care to overhaul the settlements, and, if possible, I must make up poor Jane's income.'

The sister, Lady Henry Grey, in her dowager seclusion at Brighton, contented herself with a general moan on the decadence of society, and the levelling up that made such an affair possible. She had been meditating a visit to Rockquay, to see her dear Lilius (who, by the bye, had run down to her at Brighton for a day out of the stay in London), but now she would

defer it till this matter was over. It would be too trying to have to accept this stonemason as one of the family.

As to Colonel Mohun, being one of the younger division of the family, there was no idea of consulting him, and he wrote a fairly civil little note to Adeline, hoping that she had decided for the best, and would be happy; while to the elder of the pair of sisters he said: 'So Ada has found her crooked stick at last. I always thought it inevitable. Keep up heart, old Jenny, and hold on till Her Majesty turns me off, and then we will see what is to be done.'

Perhaps this cool acquiescence was less pleasing to Adeline Mohun than a contest that would have proved her value and importance, and her brother William's observation that she was old enough to know her own mind was the cruellest cut of all. On the other hand, there was no doubt of her swain's devotion. If he had been influenced in his decision by convenience or calculation, he was certainly by this time heartily in love. Not only was Adeline a handsome, graceful woman, whose airs and affectations seemed far more absurd to those who had made merry over them from childhood than to a stranger of an inferior grade; but there was a great charm to a man, able to appreciate refinement, in his first familiar intercourse with thorough ladies. Jane began to be touched by the sight of his devotion, and convinced of his attachment, and sometimes wondered with Lady Merrifield whether

Adeline would rise to her opportunities and responsibilities, or be satisfied to be a petted idol.

One difficulty in this time of suspense was, that the sisters had no right to take into their confidence the young folks, who were quite sharp-eyed enough to know that something was going on, and, not being put on honour, were not withheld from communicating their discoveries to one another in no measured words, though fortunately they had sense enough, especially under the awe of their father, not to let them go any further than Mysie, who was entertaining because she was shocked at their audacious jokes and speculations; all at first on the false scent of their elder aunt, who certainly was in a state of excitement and uncertainty enough to throw her off the even tenor of her way and excite some suspicion. When she actually brought down a number of the *Contemporary Review* instead of *Friendly Work* for the edification of her G.F.S., Gillian tried not to look too conscious when some of the girls actually tittered in the rear; and she absolutely blushed when Aunt Jane deliberately stated that Ascension Day would fall on a Tuesday. So Gillian averred as she walked up the hill with Jasper and Mysie. It seemed a climax to the diversion she and Jasper had extracted from it in private, both wearing Punch's spectacles for the nonce, and holding such aberrations as proof positive. Mysie, on the other hand, was much exercised.

'Do you think she is in love, then?'

‘Oh yes! People always do those things in love. Besides, the Sofi hasn’t got a single white hair in her, and you know what that always means!’

‘I can’t make it out! I can’t think how Aunt Jane can be in love with a great man like that. His voice isn’t nice, you know——’

‘Not even as sweet as Bully Bottom’s,’ suggested Gillian.

‘You’re a chit,’ said Jasper, ‘or you’d be superior to the notion of love being indispensable.’

‘When people are so *very* old,’ said Mysie in a meditative voice, ‘perhaps they can’t; but Aunt Jane is very good—and I thought it was only horrid worldly people that married without love.’

‘Trust your good woman for looking to the main chance,’ said Jasper, who was better read in Trollope and Mrs. Oliphant than his sisters.

‘’Tis not main chance,’ said Gillian. ‘Think of the lots of good she would do! What a recreation room for the girls, and what schools she would set up at Rocca Marina! Depend upon it, it’s for that!’

‘I suppose it is right if Aunt Jane does it,’ said Mysie.

‘Well done, Mysie! So, Aunt Jane is your Pope!’

‘No; she’s the King that can do no wrong,’ said Gillian, laughing.

‘Wrong—I didn’t say wrong—but things aren’t always real wrong that aren’t somehow quite right,’

said Mysie, with the bewildered reasoning of perceptions that outran her powers of expression.

‘Mysie’s speeches, for instance,’ said Jasper.

‘Oh, Japs, what did I say wrong?’

‘Don’t tease her, Japs. He didn’t mean morally, but correctly.’

The three were on their way up the hill when they met Primrose, who had accompanied Mrs. Halfpenny to see Kalliope, and who was evidently in a state of such great discomposure that they all stood round to ask what was the matter; but she hung down her head and would not say.

‘Hoots! toots! I tell her she need not make such a work about it,’ said Mrs. Halfpenny. ‘The honest man did but kiss her, and no harm for her uncle that is to be.’

‘He’s a nasty man! And he snatched me up! And he is all scrubby and tobacco—ey, and I won’t have him for an uncle,’ cried Primrose.

‘I hope he is not going to proceed in that way,’ said Gillian *sotto voce* to Mysie.

‘People always do snatch up primroses,’ said Jasper.

‘Don’t, Japs! I don’t like marble men. I wish they would stay marble.’

‘You don’t approve of the transformation?’

‘Oh, Japs, is it true? Mysie, you know the statue at Rotherwood, where Pig—my—lion made a stone figure and it turned into a woman. Yes; but it was a woman and this is a man.’

Mysie began an exposition of classic fable to her little sister, while Mrs. Halfpenny explained that this came of Christian folk setting up heathen idols in their houses as 'twas a shame for decent folk to look at, let alone puir bairnies; while Jasper and Gillian gasped in convulsions of laughter, and bandied queries whether their aunt were the statue 'Pig-my-lion' had animated, as nothing could be less statuesque than she; whether the reverse had taken place, as Primrose observed, and she had been the Pygmalion to awaken the soul in the man of marble. Here, however, Mrs. Halfpenny became scandalised at such laughter in the open street; and, perceiving some one in the distance, she carried off Primrose, and enjoined the others to walk on doucely and wiselike.

Gillian was on her way to visit Kalliope and make an appointment for her mother to take her out for a drive; but as they passed the gate at Beechcroft out burst Valetta and Fergus, quite breathless.

'Oh, Gill, Gill! Mr. White is in the drawing-room, and he has brought Aunt Ada the most beautiful box you ever saw, with all the stoppers made of gold!'

'And he says I may get all the specimens I like at Rocca Marina,' shouted Fergus.

'Ivory brushes, and such a ring—sparkling up to the ceiling!' added Valetta.

'But, Val, Ferg, whom did you say?' demanded the elders, coming within the shadow of the copper beeches.

‘Aunt Ada,’ said Valetta; ‘there’s a great A engraved on all those dear, lovely bottles; and—oh, they smell!’

‘Aunt Ada! Oh, I thought——’

‘What did you think, Gill?’ said Aunt Jane, coming from the grass-plat suddenly on them.

‘Oh, Aunt Jane, I’m so glad!’ cried Gillian. ‘I thought’—and she blushed furiously.

‘They made asses of themselves,’ said Jasper.

‘They said it was you,’ added Mysie. ‘Miss Mellon told Miss Elbury,’ she added in excuse.

‘Me? No, I thank you! So you are glad, Gillian?’

‘Oh yes, aunt! I couldn’t have borne for you to do anything—queer’—and there was a look in Gillian’s face that went to Jane’s heart, and under other circumstances would have produced a kiss, but she rallied to her line of defence.

‘My dear, you must not call this queer. Mr. White is very much attached to your Aunt Ada, and I think he will make her very happy, and give her great opportunities of doing good.’

‘That’s just what Gillian said when she was afraid it was you,’ said Mysie. ‘I suppose that’s it? And that makes it real right.’

‘And the golden stoppers!’ said Valetta innocently, but almost choking Jasper with laughter, which must be suppressed before his aunt.

‘May one know it now?’ asked Gillian, sensible of the perilous ground.

‘Yes, my dears; you must have been on tenter-hooks all this time, for, of course, you saw there was a crisis, and you behaved much better than I should have done at your age; but it was only a *fait accompli* this very day, and we couldn’t tell you before.’

‘When he brought down the golden stoppers,’ Jasper could not help saying.

‘No, no, you naughty boy! He would not have dared to bring it in before; he came before luncheon—all that came after. Oh, my dear, that dressing-case is perfectly awful! I wouldn’t have such a burthen on my mind—for—for all the orphans in London! I hope there are no banditti at Rocca Marina.’

‘Only accepted to-day! How did he get all his great A’s engraved?’ said Jasper practically.

‘He could not have had many doubts,’ said Gillian. ‘Does Kalliope know?’

‘I cannot tell; I think he has probably told her.’

‘He must have met Primrose there,’ said Jasper. ‘Poor Prim!’ And the offence and the Pig-my-lion story were duly related, much to Aunt Jane’s amusement.

‘But,’ she said, ‘I think that the soul in the marble man is very real, and very warm; and, dear children, don’t get into the habit of contemning him. Laugh, I suppose you must; I am afraid it must look

ridiculous at our age; but please don't despise. I am going down to your mother.'

'May I come with you?' said Gillian. 'I don't think I can go to Kally till I have digested this a little; and, if you are going to mamma, she won't drive her out.'

Jane was much gratified by this volunteer, though Jasper did suggest that Gill was afraid of Primrose's treatment. He went on with the other three to Clipston, while Gillian exclaimed—

'Oh, Aunt Jane, shall not you be very lonely?'

'Not nearly so much so as if you were not all here,' said her aunt cheerfully. 'When you bemoaned your sisters last year we did not think the same thing was coming on me.'

'Phyllis and Alethea! It was a very different thing,' said Gillian. 'Besides, though I hated it so much, I had got used to being without them.'

'And to tell you the truth, Gill, nothing in that way ever was so bad to me as your own mother going and marrying; and now, you see, I have got her back again—and more too.'

Aunt Jane's smile and softened eyes told that the young niece was included in the 'more too'; and Gillian felt a thrill of pleasure and affection in this proof that after all she was something to the aunt, towards whom her feelings had so entirely changed. She proceeded, however, to ask with considerable anxiety what would be done about the Whites, Kalliope

especially ; and in return she was told about the present plan of Kalliope's being taken to Italy to recover first, and then to pursue her studies at Florence, so as to return to her work more capable, and in a higher position.

'Oh, how exquisite !' cried Gillian. 'But how about all the others ?'

'The very thing I want to see about, and talk over with your mother. I am sure she ought to go ; and it will not even be wasting time, for she cannot earn anything.'

Talking over things with Lady Merrifield was, however, impeded, for, behold, there was a visitor in the drawing-room. Aunt and niece exchanged glances of consternation as they detected a stranger's voice through the open window, and Gillian uttered a vituperative whisper.

'I do believe it is that dreadful Fangs' ; then, hoping her aunt had not heard—'Captain Henderson, I mean. He threatened to come down after us, and now he will always be in and out ; and we shall have no peace. He has got nothing on earth to do !'

Gillian's guess was right. The neat, trim, soldierly figure, with a long fair moustache and pleasant gray eyes, was introduced to Miss Mohun as 'Captain Henderson, one of my brother officers,' by Sir Jasper, who stood on the rug talking to him. Looks and signs among the ladies were token enough that the crisis had come ; and Lady Merrifield soon secured freedom of speech by proposing to drive her sister to Clipston, while Sir Jasper asked his visitor to walk with him.

‘You will be in haste to sketch the place,’ he said, ‘before the workmen have done their best to demolish its beauty.’

As for Gillian, she saw her aunt hesitating on account of a parochial engagement for that afternoon; and, as it was happily not beyond her powers, she offered herself as a substitute, and was thankfully accepted. She felt quite glad to do anything obliging towards her Aunt Jane, and in a mood very unlike last year’s grudging service; it was only reading to the ‘mothers’ meeting,’ since among the good ladies there prevailed such a strange incapacity of reading aloud, that this part of the business was left to so few that for one to fail, either in presence or in voice, was very inconvenient. All were settled down to their needle-work, with their babies disposed of as best they might be. Mr. Hablot had finished his little lecture, and the one lady with a voice had nearly exhausted it, and there was a slight sensation at the absence of the unfailing Miss Mohun, when Gillian came in with the apologies about going to drive with her mother.

‘And,’ as she described it afterwards, ‘didn’t those wretched beings all grin and titter; even the ladies, who ought to have had more manners, and that old Miss Mellon, who is a real growth of the hotbed of gossip, simpered and supposed we must look for such things now; and, though I pretended not to hear, my cheeks would go and flame up as red as—that tacsonia, just with longing to tell them Aunt Jane was not so

ridiculous ; and so I took hold of *For Half a Crown*, and began to read it as if I could bite them all !’

She read herself into a state of pacification, but did not attempt to see Kalliope that day, being rather shy of all that might be encountered in that house, especially after working hours. The next day, however, Lady Merrifield’s services were required to chaperon the coy betrothed in an inspection of Cliff House and furniture, which was to be renovated according to her taste ; and Gillian was to take that time for a visit to Kalliope, whom she expected to find in the garden. The usual corner was, however, vacant ; and Mr. White was heard making a growl of ‘ Foolish girl ! Doesn’t know which way her bread is buttered.’

Maura, however, came running up, and said to Gillian, ‘ Please come this way. She is here.’

‘ What has she hidden herself for ?’ demanded Mr. White. ‘ I thought she might have been here to welcome this—Miss Adeline.’

‘ She is not very well to-day,’ faltered Maura.

‘ Oh ! ay, fretting. Well, I thought she had more sense.’

Gillian followed Maura, who was no sooner out of hearing than she began : ‘ It is too bad of him to be so cross. Kally really is so upset ! She did not sleep all night, and I thought she would have fainted quite away this morning !’

Oh dear ! has he been worrying her ?’

‘ She is very glad and happy, of course, about Miss

Ada ! and he won't believe it, because he wants her to go out to Italy with them for all next winter.'

'And won't she ? Oh, what a pity !'

'She said she really could not because of us ; she could not leave us, Petros and all, without a home. She thought it her duty to stay and look after us. And then he got cross, and said that she was presuming on the hope of living in idleness here, and making him keep us all, but she would find herself mistaken, and went off very angry.'

'Oh, horrid ! how could he ?'

'I believe, if Kally could have walked so far, she would have gone down straight to Mr. Lee's. She wanted to, but she was all in a tremble, and I persuaded her not, though she did send me down to ask Mrs. Lee when she can be ready. Then when Alexis came home, Mr. White told him that he didn't in the least mean all that, and would not hear of her going away, though he was angry at her being so foolish, but he would give her another chance of not throwing away such advantages. And Alexis says she ought not. He wants her to go, and declares that he and I can very well manage with Mrs. Lee, and look after Petros, and that she must not think of rushing off in a huff for a few words said in a passion. So, between the two, she was quite upset and couldn't sleep, and, oh, if she were to be ill again !'

By this time they were in sight of Kalliope lying back in a basket-chair, shaded by the fence of the

kitchen-garden, and her weary face and trembling hand showed how much this had shaken her in her weakness. She sent Maura away, and spoke out her troubles freely to Gillian. 'I thought at first my duty was quite clear, and that I ought not to go away and enjoy myself and leave the others to get on without me. Alec would find it so dreary; and though Mr. and Mrs. Lee are very good and kind, they are not quite companions to him. Then Maura has come to think so much about people being ladies that I don't feel sure that she would attend to Mrs. Lee; and the same with Petros in the holidays. If I can't work at first, still I can make a home and look after them.'

'But it is only one winter, and Alexis thinks you ought; and, oh, what it would be, and how you would get on!'

'That is what puzzles me. Alexis thinks Mr. White has a right to expect me to improve myself, and not go on for ever making white jessamines with malachite leaves, and that he can look after Maura and Petros. I see, too, that I ought to try to recover, or I might be a burthen on Alexis for ever, and hinder all his better hopes. Then, there's the not liking to accept a favour after Mr. White said such things, though I ought not to think about it since he made that apology; but it is a horrid feeling that I ought not to affront him for the sake of the others. Altogether I do feel so tossed. I can't get back the feeling

I had when I was ill that I need not worry, for that God will decide.'

And there were tears in her eyes.

'Can't you ask some one's advice?' said Gillian.

'If I were sure they quite understood! My head is quite tired with thinking about it.'

Not many moments had passed before there were steps that made Kalliope start painfully, and Maura appeared, piloting another visitor. It was Miss Mohun, who had escaped from the survey of the rooms,—so far uneasy at what she had gathered from Mr. White, that she was the more anxious to make the offer previously agreed to.

'My dear,' she said, 'I am afraid you look tired.'

'They have worried her and knocked her up,' said Gillian indignantly.

'I see! Kally, my dear, we are connections now, you know, and I have heard of Mr. White's plan. It made me think whether you would find the matter easier if you let me have Maura while you are away to cheer my solitude. Then I could see that she did her lessons, and, between all Gillian's brothers, we could see that Petros was happy in the holidays.'

'Oh, Miss Mohun! how can I be grateful enough? There is an end of all difficulties.'

And when the inspecting party came round, and Adeline bent to kiss the white, weary, but no longer distressed face, and kindly said, 'We shall see a great deal of each other, I hope,' she replied, with an

earnest 'thank you,' and added to Mr. White, 'Miss Mohun has made it all easy to me, sir, and I am very grateful!'

'Ay, ay! You're a good girl at the bottom, and have some sense!'

CHAPTER XXIII

FANGS

EVENTS came on rapidly that spring. Mr. White was anxious that his marriage should take place quickly—afraid, perhaps, that his prize would escape him, and be daunted by the passive disapproval of her family, though this was only manifested to him in a want of cordiality. This, being sincere people, they could not help; and that outbreak to Kalliope had made the sisters so uneasy, that they would have willingly endured the ridicule of a broken engagement to secure Adeline from the risks of a rough temper where gentlemanly instincts were not inbred.

Adeline, however, knew she had gone too far to recede, though she would willingly have delayed, in enjoyment of the present homage and shrinking from the future plunge away from all her protectors. Though the strong, manly will overpowered hers, and made her submit to the necessities of the case and fix a day early in July, she clung the more closely to her sisters, and insisted on being accompanied by Jane on going to London to purchase the outfit that she had often seen

in visions before. So Miss Mohun's affairs were put in commission, Gillian taking care of them, and the two sisters were to go to Mrs. Craydon, once, as Marianne Weston, their first friend out of their own family, and now a widow with a house in London, well pleased at any recall of old times, though inclined, like all the rest, to speak of 'poor Ada.'

Lord Rotherwood was, as his cousins had predicted, less disgusted than the rest, as in matters of business he had been able to test the true worth that lay beneath the blemishes of tone and of temper; and his wife thought the Italian residence and foreign tincture made the affair much more endurable than could have been expected. She chose an exquisite tea-service for their joint wedding present; but she would not consent to let Lady Phyllis be a bridesmaid; though the Marquis, discovering that her eldest brother hated the idea of giving her away to the stonemason, offered 'not to put too fine a point on it, but to act the part of Cousin Phoenix.'

Bridesmaids would have been rather a difficulty; but then the deep mourning of Kalliope and Maura made a decided reason for excluding them; and Miss Adeline, who knew that a quiet wedding would be in much the best taste, resolved to content herself with two tiny maidens, Primrose and the contemporary Hablot, her own goddaughter, who, being commonly known as Belle, made a reason for equipping each in

the colour and with the flowers of her name, and the idea was carried out with great taste.

Valetta thought it hard that an outsider should be chosen. The young Merrifields had the failing of large families in clannish exclusiveness up to the point of hating and despising more or less all who interfered with their enjoyment of one another, and of their own ways. The absence of society at Silverfold had intensified this *farouche* tone, and the dispersion, instead of curing it, had rendered them more bent on being alone together. Worst of all was Wilfred, who had been kept at home very inconveniently by some recurring delicacy of brain and eyes, and who, at twelve years old, was enough of an imp to be no small torment to his sisters. Valetta was unmercifully teased about her affection for Kitty Varley and Maura White, and, whenever he durst, there were attempts at stings about Alexis, until new game offered itself on whom no one had any mercy.

Captain Henderson was as much in the way as a man could be who knew but one family in the place, and had no resource but sketching. His yellow moustache was to be seen at all manner of unexpected and unwelcome times. If that great honour, a walk with papa, was granted, out he popped from Marine Hotel, or a seat in the public gardens, evidently lying in ambush to spoil their walk. Or he was found *tête-à-tête* with mamma before the five-o'clock tea, talking, no doubt, 'Raphael's, Corregio's, and stuff,' as

in the Royal Wardour days. Even at Clipston, or in the coves on the beach, he was only too apt to start up from some convenient post for sketching. He really did draw beautifully; and Mysie would have been thankful for his counsels if public opinion had not been so strong.

Moreover, Kitty Varley conveyed to Valetta the speculations of Rockstone whether Gillian was the attraction.

‘Now, Val,’ said Mysie, ‘how can you listen to such nonsense?’

‘You said so before, and it wasn’t nonsense.’

‘It wasn’t Aunt Jane.’

‘No, but it was somebody.’

‘Everybody does marry somebody; but it is no use for us to think about it, for it always turns out just the contrary to all the books one ever read; so there’s no going by anything, and I don’t believe it right to talk about it.’

‘Why not? Every one does.’

‘All the good teachings say one should not talk of what one does not want one’s grown-ups to hear.’

‘Oh, but then one would never talk of anything!’

‘Oh, Val! I won’t be sure, but I don’t believe I should mind mamma’s hearing all I say.’

‘Yes; but you’ve never been to school; and I heard Bee Varley say she never saw anybody so childishly simple for her age.’

This brought the colour into Mysie's face, but she said—

‘I'd rather be simple than talk as mamma does not like; and, Val, *do* on no account tell Gillian.’

‘I haven't.’

‘And don't; don't tell Wilfred, or you know how horrid he would be.’

There was a tell-tale colour in Valetta's cheeks, by which Mysie might have discerned that Valetta had not resisted the charm of declaring ‘that she knew something,’ even though this was sure to lead to tortures of various kinds from Wilfred until it was extracted. Still the youth as yet was afraid to do much worse than look preternaturally knowing at his sister and give hints about ‘Fangs’ holding fast and the like, but quite enough to startle her into something between being flattered and indignant. She was scarcely civil to the Captain, and felt bound to express her dislike on every possible occasion, though only to provoke a grin from Wilfred and a giggle from Valetta.

Lady Merrifield's basket-carriage and little rough pony had been brought from Silverfold, and she took Kalliope out for quiet drives whenever it was possible; but a day of showers having prevented this, she was concerned to find herself hindered on a second afternoon. Gillian offered to be her substitute.

‘You know I always drive you, mamma.’

‘These are worse hills than at Silverfold, and I don't want you to come down by the sea-wall.’

‘I am sure I would not go there for something, among all the stupid people.’

‘If you keep to the turnpike you can’t come to much harm with Bruno.’

‘That is awfully—I mean horribly dusty! There’s the cliff road towards Arnscombe.’

‘That is safe enough. I don’t think you could come to much real damage; but remember that for Kally a start or an alarm would be really as hurtful as an accident to a person in health.’

‘Poor old Bruno could hardly frighten a mouse,’ said Gillian.

‘Only take care, and don’t be enterprising.’

Gillian drove up to the door of Cliff House, and Kalliope took her seat. It was an enjoyable afternoon, with the fresh clearness of June sunshine after showers, great purple shadows of clouds flitting over the sea, dimpled by white crests of wave that broke the golden path of sunshine into sparkling ripples, while on the other side of the cliff road lay the open moorland, full of furze, stunted in growth, but brilliant in colour, and relieved by the purple browns of blossoming grasses and the white stars of stitchwort.

‘This is delicious!’ murmured Kalliope, with a gesture of enjoyment.

‘Much nicer than down below?’

‘Oh yes; it seems to stretch one’s very soul!’

‘And the place is so big and wide that no one can worry with sketching.’

‘Yes, it defies that!’ said Kalliope, laughing.

‘So, Fa—Captain Henderson won’t crop up as he does at every *sketchable* place. Didn’t you know he was here?’

‘Yes, Alexis told me he had seen him.’

‘Everybody has seen him, I should think; he is always about with nothing to do but that everlasting sketching.’

‘He must have been very sorry to be obliged to retire.’

‘Horrid! It was weak; and he might have been in Egypt, well out of the way. No, I didn’t mean that’—as Kalliope looked shocked—‘but he might have been getting distinction and promotion.’

‘He used to be very kind,’ said Kalliope, in a tone of regretful remonstrance. ‘It was he who taught me first to draw.’

‘He! What, Fa—Captain Henderson?’

‘Yes; when I was quite a little girl, and he had only just joined. He found me out before our quarters at Gibraltar trying to draw an old Spaniard selling oranges, and he helped me, and showed me how to hold my pencil. I have got it still—the sketch. Then he used to lend me things to copy, and give me hints till—oh, till my father said I was too old for that sort of thing! Then, you know, my father got his commission, and I went to school at Belfast.’

‘And you have never seen him since?’

‘Scarcely. Sometimes he was on leave in my

holidays, and you know we were at the dépôt afterwards; but I shall always feel that all that I have been able to do since has been owing to him.'

'And how you will enjoy studying at Florence!'

'Oh, think what it would be if I could ever do a reredos for a church! I keep on dreaming and fancying them, and now there really seems a hope. Is that Arncliffe Church?'

'Yes; you know it has been nicely restored.'

'We had the columns to do. The reredos is alabaster, I believe, and we had nobody fit to undertake that. I so longed for the power! I almost saw it.'

'Have you seen what it is?'

'No; I never had time.'

'I suppose it would be too tiring for you now; but we could see the outside.'

Gillian forgot that Arncliffe, whose blunt gray spire protruded through the young green elms, lay in a little valley through which a stream rushed to the sea. The lane was not very steep, but there were loose stones. Bruno stumbled; he was down; the carriage stood still, and the two girls were out on opposite sides in a moment, Gillian crying out—

'Don't be frightened—no harm done!'—as she ran to the pony's head. He lay quite still with heaving sides, and she felt utterly alone and helpless in the solitary road with an invalid companion whom she did not like to leave.

‘I am afraid I cannot run for help,’ said Kalliope quietly, though breathlessly; ‘but I could sit by the horse and hold his head while you go for help.’

‘I don’t like. Oh, here’s some one coming!’

‘Can I be of any use?’

Most welcome sound!—though it was actually Captain Henderson the ubiquitous wheeling his bicycle up the hill, knapsack of sketching materials on his back.

‘Miss Merrifield! Miss White! I trust no one is hurt!’

‘Oh no, thank you, unless it is the poor pony! Kally, sit down on the bank, I insist! Oh, I am so glad you are come!’

‘Can you sit on his head while I cut the traces?’

Gillian did that comfortable thing till released, when the pony scrambled up again, but with bleeding knees, hip, and side, though the Captain did not think any serious harm was done; but it was even more awkward at the moment that both the shafts were broken!

‘What is to be done?’ sighed Gillian. ‘Miss White can’t walk. Can I run down to the village to get something to take her home?’

‘The place did not look likely to supply any conveyance better than a rough cart,’ said their friend.

‘It is quite impossible to put the poor pony in anyhow! I don’t mind walking in the least; but you know how ill she has been.’

‘I see. Only one thing to be done,’ said the

Captain, who had already turned the carriage round by the stumps of the shafts ; ' you must accept me in lieu of your pony.'

' Oh yes, thank you !' cried Gillian eagerly. ' I can lead poor Bruno, and take care of your bicycle. Jump in, Kally !'

Kalliope, who had wisely abstained from adding a useless voice to the discussion, here demurred. She could not think of such a thing ; they could very well wait in the carriage while Captain Henderson went on to the town on his bicycle and sent out a midge.

But there were showers about, and a damp feeling in the lane. Both the others thought this perilous ; besides that, there might be rude passengers to laugh at their predicament ; and Captain Henderson protested that the weight was nothing. He prevailed at last ; and she allowed him to hand her into the basket, when she could hardly stand, and wrap the dust-cloth about her. Thus the procession set forth, Gillian with poor drooping Bruno's rein in one hand and the other on the bicycle, and the Captain gallantly drawing the carriage with Kalliope seated in the midst. He tramped on so vigorously as quite to justify his declaration that it was no burthen to him. It was not a frequented road, and they met no one in the least available to do more than stare or ask a question or two, until, as they approached the town and Rockstone Church was full in view, who should appear before their eyes but Sir Jasper, Wilfred carrying on his back a huge

kite that had been for many evenings in course of construction, and Fergus acting as trainbearer.

Thus came on the first moment of Gillian's explanation, as Sir Jasper took the poor pony from her and held counsel over the damage, with many hearty thanks to Captain Henderson.

'I am sure, sir, no one could have shown greater presence of mind than the young ladies,' said that gentleman; and her father's 'I am glad to hear it!' would have gratified Gillian the more but for the impish grimace with which Wilfred favoured her behind Kalliope's impassive back.

The kite-fliers turned, not without an entreaty from the boys that they might go on alone and fly their kite.

'No, no, boys,' said their father—'not here; we shall have the kite pulling you into the sea over the cliffs. I must take the pony home; but I will come if possible to-morrow.'

Much disappointed, they went dolefully in the rear, grumbling *sotto voce* their conviction that there would be no wind to-morrow, and that it was all 'Fangs's' fault in some incomprehensible manner.

At Cliff House Kalliope was carefully handed out by Sir Jasper, trying, but with failing voice, to thank Captain Henderson, and declaring herself not the worse, though her hand shook so much that the General was not content without giving her his arm up the stairs, and telling Maura that he should send Mrs. Halfpenny

up to see after her. The maimed carriage was left in the yard, and Captain Henderson then took charge of his iron horse, and the whole male party proceeded to the livery stables; so that Gillian was able to be alone, when she humbly repeated to her mother the tale parents have so often to hear of semi-disobedience leading to disaster, but with the self-reproach and sorrow that drew the sting of displeasure. Pity for Bruno, grief for her mother's deprivation, and anxiety for Kalliope might be penance and rebuke sufficient for a bit of thoughtlessness. Lady Merrifield made no remark; but there was an odd expression in her face when she heard who had come so opportunely to the rescue.

Sir Jasper brought a reassuring account of the poor little steed, which would be usable again after a short rest, and the blemish was the less important as there was no intention of selling him. Mrs. Halfpenny, too, reported that her patient was as quiet as a lamb. 'She wasn't one to fash herself for nothing, and go into screaming cries, but kenned better what was fitting for one born under Her Majesty's colours.'

So there was nothing to hinder amusement when at dinner Sir Jasper comically described the procession as he met it. Kalliope White, looking only too like Minerva, or some of those Greek goddess statues they used to draw about, sitting straight and upright in her triumphal car, drawn by her votary; while poor Gillian came behind with the pony on one side and the bicycle

on the other, very much as if she were conducting the wheel on which she was to be broken, as an offering to the idol.

‘I think,’ said Mysie, ‘Captain Henderson was like the two happy sons in Solon’s story, who dragged their mother to the temple.’

‘Only they died of it,’ said Gillian.

‘And nobody asked how the poor mother felt afterwards,’ added Lady Merrifield.

‘I thought they all had an apotheosis together,’ said Sir Jasper. ‘Let us hope that devotion may have its reward.’

There was a little lawn outside the drawing-room windows at Il Lido. Lady Merrifield was sitting just within, and her husband had just brought her a letter to read, when they heard Wilfred’s impish voice.

‘Jack—no, not Jack—Fangs!’

‘But Fangs’s name is Jack, so it will do as well,’ said Valetta’s voice.

‘Hurrah—so it is! Jack——’

‘Hush, Wilfred—this is too foolish!’ came Gillian’s tones in remonstrance.

‘Jack and Jill went up the hill
To draw——’

‘To draw! Oh, that’s lovely!’ interrupted Valetta.

‘He is always drawing,’ said Gillian, with an odd laugh.

‘He was brought up to it. First teeth, and then

"picturs," and then—oh, my—ladies home from the wash!' went on Wilfred.

'But go on, Will!' entreated Valetta.

'Jack and Jill went up the hill
To draw a piece of water——'

'No, no,' put in Wilfred—'that's wrong!

'To draw the sergeant's daughter ;
Fangs dragged down unto the town,
And Jill came moaning after !'

'I didn't moan——'

'Oh, you don't know how disconsolate you looked ! Moaning, you know, because her Fangs had to draw the other young woman—eh, Gill? Fangs always leave an aching void, you know.'

'You ridiculous boy ! I'm sure I wish Fangs would leave a void. It wouldn't ache !'

The two parents had been exchanging glances of something very like consternation, and of the mute inquiry on one side, 'Were you aware of this sort of thing?' and an emphatic shake of the head on the other. Then Sir Jasper's voice exclaimed aloud—

'Children, we hear every word you say, and are shocked at your impertinence and bad taste !'

There was a scatter. Wilfred and Valetta, who had been pinioning Gillian on either side by her dress, released her, and fled into the laurels that veiled the guinea-pigs ; but their father's long strides pursued them, and he gravely said—

‘I am very sorry to find this is your style of so-called wit!’

‘It was only chaff,’ said Valetta, the boldest in right of her girlhood.

‘Very improper chaff! I am the last person to object to harmless merriment; but you are both old enough to know that on these subjects such merriment is not harmless.’

‘Everybody does it,’ whined Valetta, beginning one of her crying fits.

‘I am sorry you have been among people who have led you to think so. No nicely-minded girl will do so, nor any brother who wishes to see his sisters refined, right-feeling women. Go in, Valetta—I can’t suffer this howling! Go, I say! Your mother will talk to you. Now, Wilfred, do you wish to see your sisters like your mother?’

‘They’ll never be that, if they live to a hundred!’

‘Do not you hinder it, then; and never let that insulting nickname pass your lips again.’

Wilfred’s defence as to universal use in the family was inaudible, and he was allowed to slouch away.

Gillian had fled to her mother, entreating her to explain to her father that such jests were abhorrent to her.

‘But you know, mamma, if I was cross and dignified, Wilfred would enjoy it all the more, and be ten times worse.’

‘Quite true, my dear. Papa will understand; but we are sorry to hear that nickname.’

‘It was an old Royal Wardour name, mamma. Harry and Claude both used it, and—oh, lots of the young officers!’

‘That does not make it more becoming in you.’

‘N—no. But oh, mamma, he was very kind to-day! But I do wish it had been anybody else!’ And her colour rose so as to startle her mother.

‘Why, my dear, I thought you would have been glad that a stranger did not find you in that plight!’

‘But it makes it all the worse. He does beset us, mamma; and it is hard on me, after all the other nonsense!’

Lady Merrifield burst out laughing.

‘My dear child, he thinks as much of you as of old Halfpenny!’

‘Oh, mamma, are you sure?’ said Gillian, still hiding her face. ‘It was not silliness of my own; but Kitty Varley told Val that everybody said it—her sister, and Miss Mohun, and all. Why can’t he go away, and not be always bothering about this horrid place with nothing to do?’

‘How thankful I shall be to have you all safe at Clipston!’

‘But, mamma, can’t you keep him off us?’

Valetta’s sobbing entrance here prevented more; but while explaining to her the causes of her father’s displeasure, her mother extracted a good deal more of the gossip, to which she finally returned answer—

‘There is no telling the harm that is done by

chattering gossip in this way. You might have learnt by what happened before what mistakes are made. What am I to do, Valetta? I don't want to hinder you from having friends and companions; but if you bring home such mischievous stories, I shall have to keep you entirely among ourselves till you are older and wiser.'

'I never—never will believe—anybody who says anybody is going to marry anybody!' sobbed Valetta desperately and incoherently.

'Certainly no one who knows nothing about the matter. There is nothing papa and I dislike much more than such foolish talk; and to tease your sister about it is even worse; but I will say no more about that, as I believe it was chiefly Wilfred's doing.'

'I—told—Will,' murmured Valetta. 'Mysie begged me not; but I had done it.'

'How much you would have saved yourself and everybody else if you had let the foolish word die with you! Now, good-night, my dear. Bathe your eyes well, or they will be very uncomfortable to-morrow; and do try to cure yourself of roaring when you cry. It vexes papa so much more.'

Another small scene had to follow with the boy, who was quite willing to go off to bed, having no desire to face his father again, though his mother had her fears that he was not particularly penitent for 'what fellows always did when people were spooning.' He could only be assured that he would experience un-

pleasant consequences if he recurred to the practice; but Wilfred had always been the problem in the family.

The summer twilight was just darkening completely, and Lady Merrifield had returned to the drawing-room, and was about to ring for lights, when Sir Jasper came in through the window, saying—

‘No question now about renewal. Angelic features, more than angelic calmness and dignity. Ha! you there, young ladies!’ he added in some dismay as two white dresses struck his eye.

‘There’s no harm done,’ said Lady Merrifield, laughing. ‘I was thinking whether to relieve Gillian’s mind by telling her the state of the case, and Mysie is to be trusted.’

‘Oh, mamma, then it is Kalliope!’ exclaimed Gillian, already relieved, for even love could not have perceived calmness and dignity in her sitting upon Bruno’s head.

‘Has she ever talked about him?’ asked Lady Merrifield.

‘No; except to-day, when I said I hoped she was safe from him on that road. She said he had always been very kind to her, and taught her to draw when she was quite a little girl.’

‘Just so,’ said Lady Merrifield. ‘Well, when she was a little older, poor Mr. White, who was one of the most honourable and scrupulous of men, took alarm, and saw that it would never do to have the young officers running after her.’

‘It was an uncommonly awkward position,’ added Sir Jasper, ‘with such a remarkable-looking girl, and a foolish unmanageable mother. It made poor White’s retirement the more reasonable when the girl was growing too old to be kept at school any longer.’

‘And has he been constant to her all these years? How nice!’ cried Mysie.

‘After a fashion,’ said Lady Merrifield. ‘He made me the receptacle of a good deal of youthful despair.’

‘All the lads did,’ said her husband.

‘But he got over it, and it seemed to have passed out of his life. However, he asked after the Whites as soon as we met him in London; and now he tells me that he never forgot Kalliope—her face always came between him and any one whom his mother threw in his way; and he came down here, knowing her history, and with the object of seeing her again.’

‘And he has not, till now?’

‘No. Besides the absolute need of keeping her quiet, it would not exactly do for him to visit her while she is alone with Maura at Cliff House, and I wished him first to see her casually amongst us, for I dreaded her not fulfilling his ideal.’

‘Oh!’

‘When I think of her at fourteen or fifteen, with that exquisite bloom and the floating wavy hair, I see a very different creature from what she is now.’

‘Peach or ivory carving,’ said Sir Jasper.

‘Yes; she is nobler, finer altogether, and has

gained in countenance greatly ; but he may not think so, and I should like her to be looking a little less ill.'

'Well, I can't help hoping he will be disappointed, and be too stupid to care for her!' exclaimed Gillian.

'Indeed!' said her father in a tone of displeased surprise.

'He is so insignificant; he does not seem to suit with her,' said Gillian in a tone of defence; 'and there does not seem to be anything in him.'

'That only shows the effect of nursing prejudice by using foolish opprobrious nicknames. Henderson was a good officer; he has shown himself an excellent son, always sacrificing his own predilections for the sake of duty. He is a right-minded, religious, sensible man, his own master, and with no connections to take umbrage at Miss White's position. It is no commonplace man who knows how to honour her for it. Nothing could be a happier fate for her; and you will be no friend to her if you use any foolish terms of disparagement of him because he does not happen to please your fancy.'

'I am sure Gillian will do no such thing, now that she understands the case,' said her mother.

'Oh no, indeed!' said Gillian. 'It was only a first feeling.'

'And you will allow for a little annoyance, papa,' added Lady Merrifield. 'We really have had a great deal of him, and he does spoil the children's walks with you.'

Sir Jasper laughed.

‘I agree that the sooner this is over the better. You need have no doubts as to the first view, now that Gillian has effected the introduction. No words can do justice to her beauty, though, by the bye, he must have contemplated her through the back of his head!’

‘Well, won’t that do? Can’t he be sent off for the present, for as to love-making now, with all the doubts and scruples in the way, it would be the way to kill her outright.’

‘You must take that in hand, my lady—it is past me! Come, girls, give us some music!’

The two girls went up at bed-time to their room, Mysie capering and declaring that here was real, true, nice love, like people in stories; and Gillian still bemoaning a little that, whatever papa might say, Fa—Captain Henderson would always be too poor a creature for Kalliope.

‘If I was quite sure it was not only her beauty,’ added Gillian philosophically.

Lady Merrifield went up to Cliff House as early as she could the next day. She found her patient there very white and shaken, but not so much by the adventure of yesterday as by a beautiful bouquet of the choicest roses which lay on the table before her sofa, left by Captain Henderson when he had called to inquire after her.

‘What ought I to do, dear Lady Merrifield?’ she

asked. 'They came while I was dressing, and I did not know.'

'You mean about a message of thanks?'

'Yes; my dear father was so terribly displeased when I wore a rose that he gave me before the great review at Belfast that I feel as if I ought not to touch these; and yet it is so kind, and after all his wonderful kindness yesterday.'

The hand on the side and the trembling lip showed the painful fluttering of heart, and the voice died away.

'My dear, things are very different now. Take my word for it, your father could not be displeased for a moment at any kindness between you and Captain Henderson. Ten years ago he was a very young man, and his parents were living, and your father was bound in honour, and for your sake too, to prevent attentions from the young officers.'

'Oh yes, I know it would have been shocking to have got into that sort of thing!'

'But now he is entirely at his own disposal, and a man of four or five-and-thirty, who has gone through a great deal; and I do not think that to send him a friendly message of thanks for a bunch of flowers to his old fellow-soldier's daughter would be anything but what Captain White would think his due.'

'Oh,'—a sigh of relief,—'please tell him, dear Lady Merrifield!' And she stretched out her hand for the flowers, and lovingly cooled her cheek with their

petals, and tenderly admired them singly, venturing now to enjoy them and even caress them.

Lady Merrifield ventured on no more; but she carried off ultimately hopeful auguries for the gentleman who had been watching for her, very anxious to hear her report. She was, however, determined on persuading him to patience, reinforcing her assurances with Dr. Dagger's opinion, that though Kalliope's constitution needed only quiet and rest entirely to shake off the effects of the overstrain of that terrible half-year, yet that renewed agitation would probably entail chronic heart-complaint; and she insisted that without making any sign the lover should go out of reach for several months, making, for instance, the expedition to Norway of which he had been talking. He could not understand at first that what he meant to propose would not be the best means of setting that anxious heart at rest; and Lady Merrifield had to dwell on the swarm of conscientious scruples and questions that would arise about saddling him with such a family, and should not be put to rest as easily as he imagined. At last, by the further representation that she would regard her mother's death as far too recent for such matters to occupy her, and by the assertion of the now fixed conviction that attentions from him at present could only agitate and distress her harmfully, and bring on her malicious remarks, the Captain was induced to believe that Rocca Marina or Florence would be a far better scene for his courtship,

and to defer it till he could find her there in better health.

He was brought at last to promise to leave Rock-quay at once, and dispose of himself in Norway, if only Lady Merrifield would procure him one meeting with Kalliope, in which he solemnly promised to do nothing that could startle her or betray his intentions.

Lady Merrifield managed it cunningly. It had been already fixed that Kalliope should come down to a brief twelve-o'clock service held at St. Kenelm's for invalids, there to return thanks for her recovery, in what she felt as her own church; and she was to come to Il Lido and rest there afterwards. Resolving to have no spectators, Lady Merrifield sent off the entire family for a picnic at Clipston, promising them with some confidence that they would not be haunted by Captain Henderson, and that she would come in the waggonette, bringing Fergus as soon as he was out of school, drink tea, and fetch home the tired.

Sir Jasper went too, telling her, with a smile, that he was far too shy to assist her in acting chaperon.

'Dragon, you had better say—I mean to put on all my teeth and claws.'

These were not, however, very visible at the church door when she met Kalliope, who had come down in a bath-chair, but was able afterwards to walk slowly to Il Lido. Perhaps Captain Henderson was, however,

aware of them; for Kalliope had no knowledge of his presence in the church or in the street, somewhat in the rear, nor did he venture to present himself till there had been time for luncheon and for rest, and till Kalliope had been settled in the cool eastern window under the verandah, with an Indian cushion behind her that threw out her profile like a cameo.

Then, as if to call on Lady Merrifield, Captain Henderson appeared armed, according to a wise suggestion, with his portfolio; and there was a very quiet and natural overlooking of his drawings, which evidently gave Kalliope immense pleasure, quite unsuspectingly. Precautions had been taken against other visitors, and all went off so well and happily that Lady Merrifield felt quite triumphant when the waggonette came round, and, after picking up Fergus, she set Kalliope down at her own door, with something like a colour in her cheeks and lips, and thanks for a happy afternoon, and the great pleasure in seeing one of the dear old Royal Wardours again.

‘But, oh mamma,’ said Gillian, feeling as if the thorn in her thoughts must be extracted, ‘are you sure it is not all her beauty?’

‘Her beauty, no doubt, began it, and gratifies the artist eye; but I am sure his perseverance is due to appreciation of her noble character,’ said Lady Merrifield.

‘Oh, mamma, would he if she had been ever so good, and no prettier than other people?’

‘Don’t pick motives so, my child; her beauty helps to make up the sum and substance of his adoration, and she would not have the countenance she has without the goodness. Let that satisfy you.’

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

THE wedding was imminent by this time. The sisters returned from London, the younger looking brilliant and in unusual health, and the elder fagged and weary. Shopping, or rather looking on at shopping, had been a far more wearying occupation than all the schools and districts in Rockquay afforded.

And besides the being left alone, there was the need of considering her future. The family had certainly expected that a rich and open-handed man like Mr. White would bethink him that half what was sufficient for two was not enough for one to live in the same style, and would have resigned his bride's fortune to her sister; but, as a rule, he never did what was expected of him, and he had, perhaps, been somewhat annoyed by Mr. Mohun's pertinacity about settlements, showing a certain distrust of commercial wealth. At any rate, all he did was to insist on paying handsomely for Maura's board; but still Miss Mohun believed she should have to give up the pretty house built by themselves, and go into smaller

quarters, more especially as it was universally agreed that Adeline must have Mrs. Mount with her, and Mrs. Mount would certainly be miserable in 'foreign parts' unless her daughter went with her. It was demonstrated that the remaining means would just suffice to keep up Beechcroft; but Jane knew that it could be only done at the cost of her subscriptions and charities, and she merely undertook to take no measures till winter—the Rockquay season.

Sir Jasper, who thought she behaved exceedingly well about it, authorised an earnest invitation to make her home at Clipston; but though she was much gratified, she knew she should be in his way, and, perhaps, in that of the boys, and it was too far from the work to which she meant to devote herself even more completely, when it would be no longer needful to be companionable to a semi-invalid fond of society.

However, just then her brother, the Colonel, came at last for his long leave. He knew that his retirement was only a matter of months, and declared his intention of joining forces with her, if she would have him, and, in the meantime, he was desirous of contributing his full share in keeping up the home. Nor did Jane feel it selfish to accept his offer, for she knew that Clipston would give him congenial society and shooting, and that there was plenty of useful layman work for him in the town; and that 'old Reggie' should wish to set up his staff with her raised her spirits, so that cheerfulness was no longer an effort.

The wedding was to be very quiet. Only just after the day was finally fixed, Mrs. Merrifield's long decay ended unexpectedly, and Sir Jasper had to hasten to London, and thence to the funeral at Stokesley. She was a second wife, and he her only son, so that he inherited from her means that set him much more at his ease with regard to his large family than he had ever been before. The intention that Lady Merrifield should act mistress of the house at the wedding breakfast had, of course, to be given up, and only Primrose's extreme youth made it possible to let her still be a bridesmaid.

So the whole party, together with the Whites, were only spectators in the background, and the procession into church consisted of just the absolutely needful persons—the bride in a delicate nondescript coloured dress, such as none but a French dressmaker could describe, and covered with transparent lace, like, as Mysie averred, a hedgeback full of pig-nut flowers, the justice of the comparison being lost in the ugliness of the name; and as all Rockquay tried to squeeze into the church to see and admire, the beauty was not thrown away.

No tears were shed there; but afterwards, in her own familiar room, between her two sisters, Adeline White shed floods of tears, and, clinging to Jane's neck, asked how she could ever have consented to leave her, extracting a promise of coming to her in case of illness. Nothing but a knock at the door by

Valetta, with a peremptory message that Mr. White said they should be late for the train, induced her to dry her tears and tear herself away.

Kalliope and Maura remained with Miss Mohun during the bridal journey to Scotland, and by the time it was ended the former had shaken off the invalid habits, and could hardly accept the doctor's assurance that she ought not to resume her work, though she was grateful for the delights before her, and the opportunities of improvement that she was promised at Florence. Her health had certainly been improved by Frank Stebbing's departure for America. Something oozed out that made Miss Mohun suspect that he had been tampering with the accounts, and then it proved that there had been a crisis and discovery, which Mr. White had consented to hush up for his partner's sake. Alexis had necessarily known of the investigation and disclosure, but had kept absolute silence until it had been brought to light in other ways, and the culprit was beyond seas. Mr. Stebbing was about to retire from the business, but for many reasons the dissolution of the partnership was deferred.

Alexis was now in a post of trust, with a larger salary. He lodged at Mrs. Lee's, and was, in a manner, free of Miss Mohun's house; but he spent much of his leisure time in study, being now able to pay regularly for instruction from the tutor who taught at Mrs. Edgar's school.

Maura asked him rather pertly what was the use

of troubling himself about Latin and Greek, if he held himself bound to the marble works.

‘It is not trouble—it is rest,’ he said; and at her gasp, ‘Besides, marble works or no, one ought to make the best of one’s self.’

By the time Mr. and Mrs. White came back from Scotland, the repairs at Clipston had been accomplished, and the Merrifields had taken possession. It all was most pleasant in that summer weather going backwards and forwards between the houses; the Sunday coming into church and lunching at Aunt Jane’s, where Valetta and Primrose stayed for Mrs. Hablot’s class, and were escorted home by Macrae in time for evening service at Clipston, where their mother, Gillian, and Mysie reigned over their little school. There was a kind of homely ease and family life, such that Adeline once betrayed that she sometimes felt as if she was going into banishment. However, there was no doubt that she enjoyed her husband’s pride in and devotion to her, as well as all the command of money and choice of pretty things that she had obtained, and she looked well, handsome, and dignified.

Still it was evident that she was very glad of Kalliope’s companionship, and that the pair were not on those exclusively intimate terms that would make a third person *de trop*.

By Sir Jasper’s advice, Lady Merrifield did not mention the possibility of a visit from Captain Henderson, who would come upon Mr. White far better

on his own merits, and had better not be expected either by Adeline or Kalliope.

Enthusiastic letters from both ladies described the delights of the journey, which was taken in a leisurely sight-seeing manner ; and as to Rocca Marina, it seemed to be an absolute paradise. Mr. White had taken care to send out an English upholsterer, so that insular ideas of comfort might be fulfilled within. Without, the combination of mountain and sea, the vine-clad terraces, the chestnut slopes, the magical colours of the barer rocks, the coast-line trending far away, the azure Mediterranean, with the white-sailed feluccas skimming across it, filled Kalliope with the more transport because it satisfied the eyes that had unconsciously missed such colouring scenes ever since her early childhood.

The English workmen and their families hailed with delight an English lady. The chaplain and his wife were already at work among them, and their little church only waiting for the bride to lay the first stone.

The accounts of Kalliope's walks as Mrs. White's deputy among these people, of her scrambles and her sketching, made her recovery evident. Adeline had just been writing that the girl was too valuable to both herself and Mr. White ever to be parted with, when Captain Henderson came back from Norway, and had free permission from Lady Merrifield to put his fate to the touch.

English tourists who know how to behave themselves were always welcome to enliven the seclusion of Rocca Marina, and admire all, of which Adeline was

as proud as Mr. White himself. Recommendations to its hospitality did not fail, and the first of Adeline's long letters showed warm appreciation of this pleasant guest, who seemed enchanted with the spot.

Next, Mrs. White's sagacity began to suspect his object, and there ensued Kalliope's letter, full of doubts and scruples, unable to help being happy, but deferring her reply till she should hear from Lady Merrifield, whether it could be right to burthen any man with such a family as hers.

The old allegiance to her father's commanding officer, as well as the kindness she had received, seemed to make her turn to ask their approval as if they were her parents; and of course it was heartily given, Sir Jasper himself writing to set before her that John Henderson was no suddenly captivated youth unable to calculate consequences, but a man of long-trying affection and constancy, free from personal ties, and knowing all her concerns. The younger ones all gave promise of making their own way, and a wise elder brother was the best thing she could give them. Even Richard might be the better for the connection, and Sir Jasper had taken care that there should be some knowledge of what he was.

There was reason to think that all hesitation had been overcome even before the letters arrived. For it appeared that Captain Henderson had fraternised greatly with Mr. White, and that having much wished for an occupation, he had decided to become a partner

in the marble works, bringing the art-knowledge and taste that had been desirable, and Kalliope hoped still to superintend the mosaic workers. It was agreed that the marriage had far better take place away from Rockquay, and it was resolved that it should be at Florence, and that the couple should remain there for the winter, studying art, and especially Florentine mosaic, and return in the spring, when the Stebbings would have concluded their arrangements and vacated their house.

Mr. White, in great delight, franked out Alexis and Maura to be present at the wedding; and a longing wish of Kalliope's that Mr. Flight would officiate was so far expressed that Lady Merrifield mentioned it to him. He was very much moved, for he had been feeling that his relations with the Whites had been chiefly harmful, though, as Alexis now assured him, his notice had been their first ray of comfort in their changed life at Rockquay. The experience had certainly made him older and wiser. Mrs. White—or, as her nieces could not help calling her among themselves, the Contessa di Rocca Marina—urged that her sister Jane should join the company, and bring Gillian to act as the other bridesmaid. This, after a little deliberation, was accepted, and the journey was the greatest treat to all concerned. Mr. Flight, the only one of the party who had travelled before in the sense of being a tourist, was amused by the keen and intense delight of Miss Mohun as well as the younger ones in all they beheld,

and he steered them with full experience of hotels and of what ought to be visited, so as to be an excellent courier.

As to Rocca Marina, where they spent a few days, no words would describe their admiration, though they brought home a whole book of sketches to back their descriptions. They did not, however, bring back Maura. Mrs. White had declared that she must remain to supply the place of her sister. She was nearly fifteen years old, and already pretty well advanced in her studies; she would pick up foreign languages, the chaplain would teach her when at Rocca Marina, and music and drawing would be attainable in the spring at Florence. Moreover, Mr. White promised to regard her as a daughter.

Another point was settled. Alexis had worked in earnest for eight months, and had convinced himself that the marble works were not his vocation, though he had acquitted himself well enough to induce Mr. White to offer him a share in the business, and he would have accepted it if needful. He had, however, made up his mind to endeavour to obtain a scholarship at Oxford, and Captain Henderson promised that whether successful in this or not, he should be enabled to keep his terms there. Mr. White could not understand how a man could prefer being a poor curate to being a rich quarrymaster, but his wife and the two sisters had influence enough to prevent him from being offended; and this was the easier, because

Theodore had tastes and abilities that made it likely that he would be thoroughly available at the works.

What shall be said of the return to Rockstone? Mr. Flight came home first, then, after many happy days of appreciative sightseeing, Aunt Jane and Gillian. They had not been ashamed of being British spinsters with guide-books in their hands; nor, on the other hand, had they been obliged to see what they did not care about, and Mr. White had put them in the way of the best mode of seeing what they cared about; and above all, the vicissitudes of travel, even in easy-going modern fashion, had made them one with each other according to Jane's best hopes. It was declared that the aunt looked five years younger for such recreation as she had never known before, and she set to work with double energy.

When, in May, Captain and Mrs. Henderson took possession of the pretty house that had been fitted up for them, though Miss Mellon might whisper to a few that *she* had only been one of the mosaic hands, there was not much inclination to attend to the story among the society to which Lady Merrifield introduced her. These acquaintances would gladly have seen more of her than she had time to give them, between family claims and home cares, her attention to the artistic side of the business, for which she had not studied in vain, and her personal and individual care for the young women concerned therein. For years to come, even, it was likely that visitors to Rockstone would

ask one another if they had seen that remarkably beautiful Mrs. Henderson.

Mrs. White, reigning there in the summer, in her fine house and gardens, though handsome as ever, had the good sense to resign the palm of beauty, and be gratified with the admiration for one whom she accepted as a *protégée* and appendage, whose praise reflected upon herself. And Cliff House under the new regime was a power in Rockstone, with its garden-parties, drawing-room meetings on behalf of everything good and desirable, its general superintendence and promotion of all that could aid in the welfare of the place. There was general rejoicing when it was occupied.

Adeline, in better health than she had enjoyed since her early girlhood, and feeling her consequence both in Italy and at Rockstone, was often radiant, always kind and friendly and ready with patronage and assistance. Her sisters wondered at times how absolute her happiness was; they sometimes thought she said too much about it, and about her dear husband's indulgence, in her letters, to be quite satisfactory; and when she came to Rockstone there was an effusiveness of affection towards her family, an unwillingness to spare her sisters or nieces from her side, an earnest desire to take one back to Italy with her, that betrayed something lacking in companionship. Jane detected likewise such as the idolising husband felt this attachment a little over much.

It was not quite possible to feel him one with her

family, or make him feel himself one. He would always be 'company' with them. He had indeed been invited to Beechcroft Court, but it was plain that the visit had been stiff and wearisome to both parties, even more so than that to Rotherwood, where there was no reason to look for much familiarity.

In the same way, to Reginald Mohun, who had been obliged to retire as full Colonel, Mr. White was so absolutely distasteful that it was his sister's continual fear that he would encourage the young people's surreptitious jokes about their marble uncle. Sir Jasper, always feeling accountable for having given the first sanction, did his best for the brother-in-law; but in spite of regard, there was no getting over the uncongeniality that would always be the drop in Adeline's cup. The perfect ease and confidence of family intercourse *would* alter on his entrance!

Nobody got on with him so well as Captain Harry May. For I do not 'speak' to that dull elf who cannot figure to himself the great family meeting that came to pass when the colonists came home—how sweet and matronly 'Aunt Phyllis' looked, how fresh and bright her daughters were, and how surprised Valetta was to find them as well instructed and civilised as herself, though she did not, like Primrose, expect to see them tattooed. One of the party was no other than Dolores Mohun. She had been very happy with her father for three years. They had been at Rotorua at the time of the earthquake, and Dolores

had acquired much credit for her reasonableness and self-possession; but there had been also a young lady, not much above her own age, who had needed protection and comfort, and the acquaintance there begun had ended in her father deciding on a marriage with a pretty, gentle creature as unlike the wife of his youth as could be imagined.

Dolores had behaved very well, as her Aunt Phyllis warmly testified; but it was a relief to all parties when the proposal was made that, immediately after the wedding, she should go home under her aunt's escort to finish her education. She had learnt to love and trust Aunt Phyllis; but to be once more with Aunt Lily and Mysie was the greatest peace and bliss she could conceive. And she was a very different being from the angular defiant girl of those days which seemed so long ago.

There is no need to say more at present of these old friends. There is no material for narrative in describing how the 'calm decay' of Dr. May in old age was cheered by the presence of his sailor son, nor in the scenes where the brothers, sisters, and friends exchanged happy recollections, brightened each other's lives with affection, and stimulated one another in serving God in their generation.

THE END

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